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Revelation and theology : a study of the theological epistemologies of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth.

Chia, Roland

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REVELATION AND THEOLOGY
A STUDY OF THE
THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGIES
OF
HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
AND
KARL BARTH

by

Roland Chia

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of

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to

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the revelation theologies and theological epistemologies of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth.

The first of the three parts discusses the presuppositions behind Balthasar's theological aesthetics. Balthasar's vision is to reinstate the beautiful in theology and to understand both theology and culture from the *Gestalt* of God in the world which is the Incarnation. This Christocentric vision implies that Christ as the *Gestalt der Gestalten* fulfils as well as transforms all human conceptions of the divine found in mythology, philosophy and religion. It leads to a trinitarian revelation theology in which the work of the Spirit in providing the *sensorium* needed for theological knowledge is not neglected.

In the second part, our attention is focused on Karl Barth. The Reformed theologian's battle with anthropocentric theology has resulted in a profound revelation theology and epistemology that is centred solely on Christ and faith in him. This is the basis for his total rejection of natural theology. Barth's theology of revelation argues therefore for a radical discontinuity between all human concepts of the divine and the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The final part discusses the fundamental dissonance between the approaches of the two theologians, their agreement in important matters notwithstanding. This difference can be studied from various angles, but it is here approached from their concepts of analogy. Balthasar's catalogical-analogy, it will be argued, has provided a way forward by bringing the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia entis* into a christological and trinitarian framework thereby surmounting the impasse which comes

from the fruitless alternative between the two. This has opened a way of articulating a theology of continuity within the context of a more radical discontinuity without either neglecting the integrity of the created order, or trivialising the seriousness of Barth's concerns.

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ABBREVIATIONS

References to the works listed below are followed directly by the volume number and the page number, except in the case of the *Church Dogmatics*, where the part numbers are also included, followed directly by the page number.

- CD* Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-77).
- C.Gent.* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, edited by the English Dominican Fathers, (London: Burns and Oates).
- Comm.* John Calvin, *Commentaries of the Old and New Testaments*.
- ET* Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 3 vols., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, 1991, 1993).
- FQI* Karl Barth, *Anslem: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (London: SCM Press, 1960).
- GL* Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols., ed., Joseph Fessio and John Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984-1990).
- Instit.* John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vols. I & II, (ed.) John T. McNeill, *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vols. XX & XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press).
- KB* Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).
- MP* Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale. The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).
- SJT* *Scottish Journal of Theology*.
- ST* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*
- TD* Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, Vols. 1 - 3 in English translation (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, 1990, 1992).

WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal.*

Full details of these books are given in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to interpret and appraise the fundamental and revelation theologies of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth. It seeks to address the question of the relationship between revelation and theology from the standpoint of their theological epistemologies. By so placing them in juxtaposition we hope not only to highlight and clarify the fundamental differences in their theological epistemologies and methodologies, but also to bring to light the significant areas of similarities and convergence. The latter stem from the fact that both the theologies of Barth and Balthasar can be understood as responses to the incipient monism, immanentism and anthropocentrism that are so pervasive in both Catholic and Protestant theologies. The theologies of Barth and Balthasar can therefore be seen as attempts to reinstate theology in its proper status and vision by reflecting on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. However differently this is understood and unfolded in their respective theologies, the call for a Christocentric and theocentric theology can be understood to be the most fundamental impulse in both theologians.

Balthasar seeks to understand theology and culture from the standpoint of the Incarnation, that is to say, from the standpoint of the *Gestalt* of God revealed in the flesh. For Balthasar, Christ is form because he is content. Therefore theology receives its form entirely from this content which moulds it and gives it shape. Theology is not only indissolubly united to the supreme form of the Incarnation but is also measured by it. Therefore theology must be a catalogically/analogically mediated integration. Here Balthasar is launching his fierce attack against the grandiose subjectivism of the avant-garde Catholicism for which Teilhard de Chardin, Martin Heidegger and Alfred

North Whitehead are philosophical mentors. For the same reason Balthasar finds it necessary to maintain his distance from the pansacramentalism of Karl Rahner, even though they were both profoundly influenced by the philosophical innovations of Maurice Blondel and Joseph Maréchal, and to take his stand among the theologians of the so-called Christological renaissance - Erich Przywara, Romano Guardini and Michael Schmaus.

Karl Barth's battle with the anthropological-immanentist theologies of liberal Protestantism since Schleiermacher is well-known. Barth seeks to free Neo-Protestantism from the chains of this methodological error, associated with Ritschl, Herrmann and Troeltsch, by his Copernican Revolution in theological method which sees Christ at the centre of theology and faith as indispensable to the knowledge of God. By emphasising the ontological difference between God and the world, Barth hopes to repair the damage caused by neo-Protestantism, namely, the acculturation and domestication of faith which resulted in the transmutation of Christianity into a culture religion. In the light of this Barth distances himself from his contemporaries, Bultmann and Tillich, in whose approaches he sees the resuscitation of the immanentism of liberal Protestantism.

These common concerns notwithstanding, the revelation theologies and theological epistemologies of the two Swiss-German theologians differ at a very fundamental level. This means that all similarities and agreement must be viewed and assessed in the light of this difference, and only after the latter is fully appreciated. Several reasons may be attributed to the disjunction between the thoughts of the two theologians. Firstly, though it has been rightly said that Barth's theology is the *via media* between liberal Protestantism and Catholicism, his desire to recapture and

revive those fundamental theological concerns of the great Reformers has placed him at a cautious distance from the theology of Rome, even the theologies of those thinkers, one of whom is Balthasar, in which he has found some promise. Similarly though Balthasar's openness to and admiration for Barth has the consequence of approximating him closer to Protestant theology, yet, the presuppositions, structure and content of his theology shows him to be a faithful son of the Church of Rome and her theology. The second reason is related to the first. Balthasar's theology bears that characteristic feature of those theologies which, having been impacted by the theology of Karl Barth, now seek to venture beyond it. Balthasar seeks to integrate the Barthian Christological focus into the nature-grace schema of Catholic theology whereby the *analogia entis* is subsumed under the *analogia fidei* without controverting the former's important role. This has resulted in a Christocentrism that is quite different from the one proposed by Barth, one which accommodates the natural theology of the Vatican.

This study is based primarily on Balthasar's work on theological aesthetics *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Vols. 1-7) and his study on Karl Barth's theology. Our study of Barth will be based on the Swiss theologian's monumental *Church Dogmatics* (Vols I - IV). The study is divided into three parts, the first of which discusses the theology of Balthasar. Chapter 1 explores the theological and philosophical presuppositions behind Balthasar's theological aesthetics. Chapters 2 & 3 analyse his theology of revelation and understanding of theological knowledge. This first part ends with a brief assessment of Balthasar's theology. Part Two is devoted to the exposition and interpretation of Barth's concept of revelation and theory of theological knowledge. Chapter 4 examines Barth's thesis that God can only be known by God, and that theological epistemology must be understood from the doctrine of

God. Chapter 5 is a study of Barth's Christocentrism, while Chapter 6 examines the implications of Barth's doctrine of creation on his theological epistemology. This chapter also studies the significance of Anselm on Barth's theological epistemology and methodology, picking up once again Barth's main thesis. The final part, which comprises two chapters, offers a discussion of the fundamental differences between the approaches of the two theologians. Chapter 7 is an analysis of the problem of the analogy of being, a concept rejected by Barth but considered by Balthasar as indispensable for theology. Here, in the concept of analogy, is where the problematic relationship between ontology and epistemology can be appreciated in all its acuity. It shall be argued that although Catholic analogy, and *ipso facto* Balthasar's concept of analogy, presupposes an ontology, epistemology and theological methodology that are rather different from Barth's, the two are not as irreconcilable as is generally assumed. The final chapter delineates Balthasar's attempt to surmount the impasse which the unfruitful alternative between the *analogia fidei* and *analogia entis* has yielded. This he does by his catalogical analogy, which while embracing the Christological emphasis of Barth on the one hand, refuses on the other to stop short as Barth does of working out the implications of the Christological vision to the full. Here, then, is to be found a way of articulating a theology of continuity within the context of a more radical discontinuity, which has as its presupposition the centrality of the theology of the cross, without marginalising what has been traditionally called a theology of glory. In it is also found a way of conceiving the relationship between the centre and the periphery of man's knowledge of God.

PART ONE

THE FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

OF

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

CHAPTER I

A THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the fundamental premises and principles that are involved in the construction of Balthasar's theological aesthetics. We shall look firstly at the significance of beauty or the idea of the beautiful in Balthasar's thought to see how the concept of beauty as a transcendental enables him properly to formulate a theological aesthetics. Next, we shall examine the principle of analogy, paying particular attention to the way in which Balthasar adopts and applies this important concept which pre-supposes a theology of nature. The principle of analogy, as we shall see, constitutes the basic governing principle and structure of Balthasar's theology, orchestrating his system into one coherent unity. Thirdly, we shall see how Balthasar uses the principle of analogy to establish a correlation between aesthetics, metaphysics and theology. And fourthly, we shall see how Balthasar himself struggles to achieve his theological aesthetics. We shall examine closely the route he takes, travelling with him as it were, to see how he carefully and resolutely avoids the dangers and pitfalls that await not only the theological dilettante, but even those who rank among its most matured and sophisticated exponents.

2. Theology and Beauty

a. Balthasar's Understanding of Beauty

Balthasar invites us to look at the whole of Christian theology under the sign of Beauty. 'Beauty is the word that shall be our first', he writes with such startling

simplicity in the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*.¹ He goes on to describe what constitutes Beauty. The many words that describe Beauty gravitate towards the mystery of form (*Gestalt*) or figure (*Gebilde*). The two words that describe Beauty, *formosus* ('beautiful') and *speciosus* ('comely'), come from the words *forma* ('shape') and *species* ('likeness') respectively. Thus Beauty is the radiance from within, a radiance which transforms the *forma* into the *formosus* and the *species* into the *speciosus*, making the outward form into something love-worthy.²

Here are Balthasar's own words as he explains his concept of the beautiful:

The beautiful is above all a *form*, and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form's interior ... The content (*Gehalt*) does not lie outside the form (*Gestalt*) but within it ... In the luminous form of the beautiful the being of the existent becomes perceivable as nowhere else, and this is why an aesthetic element must be associated with all spiritual perception as with all spiritual striving.³

Balthasar sees Beauty as a transcendental, a fundamental determination of Being. Beauty is not simply the property of certain objects. Rather 'all things partake in some degree or another in beauty'.⁴ That which manifested in the beauty of created and finite forms is the glory of Being, *der Glanz des Seins*.

b. *Theology's Rejection of the Aesthetic*

According to Balthasar, religion in general no longer loves or fosters Beauty.

¹ GL I:18.

² GL I:19-20.

³ GL I:151, 153.

⁴ John Riches, 'The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, I', *Theology*, 45 (1972), 565.

Beauty is treated superficially so that it might be easily ousted.⁵ Theology has also forsaken Beauty and the aesthetic. By thus neglecting the *gestalt* of the Incarnation, theology has failed to do justice to the very revelation which Christians have concretely received.

From the very start of the Reformation, Protestant theology has embarked on this operation of excluding aesthetics from theology. Luther started by making the doctrine of justification, as it is portrayed in Romans and Galatians, the axis of his theology. Luther's polemic against Catholicism's dulling of the sharp cutting edge of the Word of God springs from this theological axis. He saw how the neo-Platonic non-dialectic schemata of Catholicism had in fact replaced the Death-and-Resurrection dialectic of the Christ event. This neo-Platonic non-dialecticism has portrayed the world as the 'appearing' of the 'non-appearing' God. Such 'aesthetic' theologising, according to Luther, becomes a series of stages through which the creation can approach the Deity ontologically, ethically and mystically.⁶

Luther wanted to recover the central pronouncements of the Bible, namely the sovereign and mysterious God whose unfathomable decision to create the world cannot be deduced from any theory of Ideas or appropriated by any connecting analogies; the even less penetrable work of salvation through Jesus Christ which can be grasped only by an act of a totally blind surrender of trust; and finally the *absconditas Dei sub contrario*, the absolute veiledness of God, which makes any form of human appreciation which is independent of God's own self-disclosure impossible.⁷

⁵ GL I:18.

⁶ GL I:45.

⁷ GL I:47.

In the light of these three fundamental statements, it is not difficult to understand Luther's attack on the 'whore' of reason 'which aesthetically attempts to achieve a harmony between divinity and humanity'. There can therefore be no harmonising, no skill, no comprehension. Any attempt by man to impose his own ideas on the divine revelation is futile: the very form will disintegrate in the face of the 'contradiction'. Balthasar is of the opinion that this negation by Luther first began as an admonition, the warning of a *correctio fraterna*, but later it became a fundamental rejection of the other in schism.⁸

This separation of the aesthetics from theology continues to advance after Luther. In his second volume of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard can no longer envisage a meeting between religion and aesthetics. In fact he was impelled to use the term 'aesthetic' to describe a basic attitude which to him is unacceptable for the Christian. Kierkegaard in his writings delineates all the more clearly the total difference between the *agape* of Christ and his followers on the one hand, and human *eros* on the other, resulting in a situation where man is robbed of all joy of the aesthetic.⁹ Living in an age in which aesthetics was sharply distinguished from logic and ethics and was given its own particular value, Kierkegaard passed judgement in advance on the aesthetic element in liberal theology which was renewed and was heavily dependent on Schleiermacher and Hegel. Consequently, the determining factor of those who consciously or unconsciously followed Kierkegaard is the opposition they sense

* Balthasar suggests that this negation has resulted in a double curse: first the splintering of Protestantism, and, second, the sects having to oscillate between irreconcilable extremes since the dialectic has become a method that can be manipulated (*GL* I:48).

⁹ *GL* I:49-50.

between the two realms. Somehow the word 'aesthetics' is used to describe an attitude which is frivolous, curious and self-indulgent.¹⁰

The renewed interest in the thought of Kierkegaard has had an anti-aesthetic effect on theology. Balthasar cites Brunner as a good instance of this. Brunner 'develops Kierkegaard's polemical schema of opposites into a methodological theological opposition between contemplative "mysticism" and prophetic and Biblical faith in the Word'.¹¹ In Bultmann we see the dissolution of any and every form of revelation that is objectivised and historically perceivable. What we have in its place is the subjective and inward decision of faith which comes through an awareness of the existential *pro me* of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; a real awareness of having been, as it were, gripped by Christ. Balthasar describes this as an approach full of anguish because of its lack of imagery and form, and calls it a 'real dead-end for Protestantism'.¹²

Balthasar, however, appears to be very appreciative of the efforts of Karl Barth who sought to preserve the element of the aesthetics in theology. 'Here we must acknowledge the great service rendered by the theology of Karl Barth of having recognised the imminent danger of shipwreck and having, unaided, put the helm hard over'.¹³ Barth succeeded in overcoming the either/or between Hegel and Kierkegaard. In following Hegel, he saw the need for an 'objectively normed' and 'objectively formed' dogmatics, and proceeded to construct it. In following

¹⁰ GL I:51.

¹¹ GL I:52.

¹² GL I:52.

¹³ GL I:53.

Kierkegaard, he saw the importance of the personal faith-relationship between God and man, a relationship made possible by the mediation of the God-man Jesus Christ, and gave much weight to it in his theology.

Contrary to Kierkegaard's concept of aesthetics, Barth arrives at the content of Beauty in a purely theological manner. This is done through the contemplation of the data of scriptures and the glory of God. Thus Barth can say that God is beautiful: 'beautiful in a manner proper to him and to him alone, beautiful as the unattainable Primal Beauty, but ... precisely for this reason, beautiful not only as a fact, not only as a force, but rather: as a fact and as a force in the manner in which he asserts himself as the one who arouses pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*), creates desire (*Begehren*) for himself, and rewards with delight (*Genuss*) ..., the one who as God is both lovely and love-worthy'.¹⁴ The beauty of God is evidenced in the unity of his humiliation and exaltation. It is through the Cross of Christ that the beauty and glory of God is known:

... To the unity of his humiliation and exaltation, God brings his own form and proper beauty. Isaiah's phrase, 'He has neither form nor beauty' determines the precise locus from which God's unique beauty radiates: 'If we seek Christ's beauty in a glory which is not that of the Crucified we are doomed to seek in vain'. 'In this self-realisation, God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, what we call 'ugly' as well as what we call 'beautiful'.¹⁵

In following Anselm, Barth considers theology as the most beautiful of the sciences because of its object. And it is precisely in this regard that the dogmatics of Karl Barth, according to Balthasar, represents a decisive breakthrough:

If his call to return to pre-Reformation theology inspires such trust, it

¹⁴ GL I:53-54.

¹⁵ GL I:55-56.

is because he claims for his theology only those elements of Patristic and Scholastic thought which can be justified from revelation itself and which, accordingly, are not suspect of undue Platonising. In any event, we must not fail to note that Barth was aware that the delineations of an authentic theological aesthetics which he offered has no roots within the realm of Protestant theology, and that, in order to give such a theological aesthetics a home within his own theology, Barth himself had to cut his actualism back sufficiently to make room alongside it for the concept of objective form.¹⁶

However, in Balthasar's estimation, Barth has not succeeded in transforming Protestant theology. Instead, Protestant theology has submitted to Bultmann's dualism of criticism on the one hand, and existential, imageless inwardness on the other.¹⁷

The elimination of aesthetics from theology is not only a phenomenon to be found in Protestantism. Catholic theology has developed a sharp contradistinction between philosophy and theology. This contradistinction is a late development and, according to Balthasar, is wholly without basis. We are faced today with the question as to *how far* human reason can come to the knowledge of God without positive revelation. This question is totally abstract and ahistorical and is a problematic only for modern rationalism. Balthasar mentions Anselm, Aquinas, and Nicholas of Cusa, all of whom saw an interpenetration of philosophy and theology. He attributes the modern distinction as having its genesis from Descartes:

Only with Descartes does philosophy become dependent on the scientific ideal of the rising of natural sciences, thereby beginning its rift from theology. And only from this point onwards do philosophers become eager to experiment with the question of what reason can accomplish without the aid of revelation and what the possibilities are for a pure nature without grace.¹⁸

¹⁶ GL I:56.

¹⁷ GL I:56.

¹⁸ GL I:72.

Balthasar ends with this observation: 'The middle of the last century then saw the end of all those great theological systems which still followed the great examples we have cited and clung in spite of all to the model of the ancient unity between philosophy and theology, by-passing the modern understanding of "faith" and "knowledge"'.¹⁹ Alongside this we see the trend of 'specialisation' in which theology is both declared and declares itself to be a 'specialisation' among others. Furthermore, we see also the present pre-occupation to make the science of theology subservient to the methods of the exact sciences. This means that Christianity may be *subsumed under* the historical sciences. It also means that theology has become a science of 'accidental historical truths' (Lessing).

All these influences have prevented aesthetics from taking its proper place in theology; they have emptied theology of all aesthetic elements. Theology has consequently moved in the opposite direction, and has satisfied itself with a rational interpretation of scripture (exegesis), of nature and history (fundamental theology), and of the ecclesiastical tradition (dogmatic theology). Louis Dupré has rightly observed that the whole theological project of Balthasar is to 'reintegrate grace and nature, thought and feeling, body and mind, culture and theology within a synthetic, comprehensive, theological reflection on form'.²⁰

c. *The Place of Aesthetics in Theology*

For Balthasar, theology is the only science that can have transcendental beauty

¹⁹ GL I:73-74.

²⁰ Louis Dupré, 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics', *Communio*, Vol 16 (1989), 386.

as its object. Philosophy alone, without theology, cannot do this. Philosophy can envisage the absolute only as the *principium et finis mundi*, the 'limiting concept of a worldly ontology'.²¹ Therefore without theology, philosophy can only make formal statements about beauty. Only theology can perceive beauty as a transcendental which belongs to and is the primary manifestation of Being itself.²²

As a transcendental, beauty is also seen in visible and finite things. Bonaventura measures the beauty in visible and temporal things by their ability to manifest 'an archetypal reality that transcends all forms'.²³ The transcendental of beauty, however, does not destroy or dull the finite's own expressiveness, 'for the form constitutes no attempt to copy its divine source, but to manifest a God who remains hidden, and precisely in its ability to do so lies its formal (i.e. aesthetic) perfection'.²⁴

This ontological nature of beauty is lost to modern aestheticians whose subjectivist attitude has caused them to turn away from the 'sure light of Being' (St Thomas), resulting in the reduction of poetry and art to formalist exercises that are marginal to the deeper concerns of human existence.

Balthasar asserts emphatically that a theology which does not give the aesthetics a primary place is unable to make an impact in the world. 'Only beautiful theology, that is, only theology which, grasped by the glory of God is able to transmit its rays, has the chance of making any impact in human history by conviction and

²¹ *GL* I:70.

²² Dupré, 'Balthasar', 387.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

transformation'.²⁵

This conviction radiates throughout the history of the Christian church and is the hallmark of both patristic and medieval theologians. In Irenaeus we find the idea that God as the creative artist who created the world to bear his image as its creator.²⁶ In Bonaventura we discover how beautiful things are really the expressions of God Himself and that these have beauty because they achieve or bear the resemblance of God. Thus beauty points to God who for Bonaventura is the 'beauty past all hope' (*anelpiston kalos*), and this beauty is to be 'received in man in the aesthetical-mystical ecstasy of wonderment and inflamed adoration'.²⁷

d. *A Warning*

Balthasar is however not so naive as to be unaware of the dangers of the aesthetics, and in his writings, he issues a clear warning to his readers. Beauty can shine so magnificently, so brilliantly that the witness of God in the beautiful is overlooked. Beauty then becomes 'a mouse trap, for beauty of the creature allures men; so beauty directly satisfies the lust which strives "to know what is concealed, to look at what is beautiful, to possess what is lovely and valuable"'.²⁸ Theology must never be so blinded by the glare of earthly beauty that it falls into the entrapment of what Balthasar calls the 'current view-points in an inner-worldly theory of beauty'. To do this is surely to cause 'theological aesthetics' (i.e. the attempt to do

²⁵ GL II:13.

²⁶ GL II:71.

²⁷ GL II:352.

²⁸ GL II:351.

aesthetics at the level and with the methods of theology) to deteriorate into an ‘aesthetic theology’ (i.e. aesthetics understood in the worldly, limited and therefore pejorative sense). This for Balthasar is nothing less than a betrayal, a ‘selling out’ of the theological substance to a this-worldly aestheticism.²⁹

In the following pages, we shall see how Balthasar has in practice avoided these snares in the construction of his own theological aesthetics. But first we need to look at a very important principle that dominates his thought, the principle of analogy or what is sometimes called the *analogia entis*.

3. The Principle of Analogy

a. *Nature and Grace*

The theological aesthetics of Balthasar presupposes a theology of nature and uses the principle of analogy as its fundamental principle. Balthasar stands alongside Przywara and Maréchal in their criticism of the so-called ‘extrincism’ of Neo-scholasticism, which is particularly evident in the doctrine of grace. This doctrine portrays man with a self-contained human ‘nature’ equipped with its own natural goal. Grace is then added as an undeserved ‘supplement’ which consequently endows the human person with an additional ‘supernatural’ goal. This understanding of nature and grace with the awkward externalising of the latter is unacceptable to Balthasar.³⁰

It was the French philosopher Blondel who first offered a sharp critique of this ‘two-storey thinking’. In his method of immanence, Blondel sought to posit a

²⁹ GL I:38.

³⁰ Medard Kehl, ‘Introduction: Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait’, *The von Balthasar Reader*. Medard Kehl & Werner Loser (eds.), (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), 18.

continuity between nature and grace by arguing against the externalising of grace and by describing the 'inner demand for the supernatural as a necessary part of the human spirit'.³¹ His thinking brought the birth of a new era in the Catholic theology of his century with its affirmation of the inner unity of history and revelation, experience and faith, nature and grace without denying their distinction.

Two significant developments issue from this. The first is the 'transcendental theology' of Karl Rahner which attempts to mediate classic Thomistic metaphysics with the philosophy of spirit characteristic of German Idealism. Following the Blondelian paradigm of the mystical uniting of God with the human being, Rahner sought to find the real place of that union in the spirit of the human subject. The result of this is the notion that since man is a spiritual subject, he always has an orientation to God and that in every concrete intellectual knowing and doing, he has something of the 'transcendental' experience of God.³²

Balthasar represents another line of approach. He begins not with the subjectivity of the human being, nor with the intellectual self-realisation of the human subject, but 'more objectively' with the whole of reality which man encounters. It is from this reality that he tried to find the locus of the unity between God and the world. Nature, for Balthasar, is not the *natura pura* of neo-scholasticism but the whole human condition in its given objective worldly reality. James Zeitz is right in asserting that here Balthasar stands 'in total conformity with the Church Fathers,

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

where nature means the whole of the human condition'.³³ Thus the concept of nature is already analogous since man cannot stand outside his given concrete nature.

b. *Erich Przywara*

Balthasar's concept of the *analogia entis* is deeply influenced by the teaching of Erich Przywara. Przywara's direct influence on Balthasar can be traced back to the summers of 1935 - 1938 when the latter worked at the former's house for the periodical *Stimmen der Zeit*.

In his major work entitled *Analogia Entis: Metaphysik, Ur-Struktur und All-Rhythmus*, Przywara carefully sets out his understanding of the principle of analogy. For him the objective worldly reality is characterised by a two-fold polarity: an inner-worldly reality which comprises the tension between *Dasein* (existence) and *Sosein* ('whatness or essence'); and a supra-worldly reality, the tension between creature-Creator. Przywara sums up this tension in the formula *analogia entis*.

Medard Kehl has provided us with a succinct description of Przywara's concept of the analogy of being:

... finite reality is profoundly analogous in its being, that is, simultaneously similar and dissimilar to the being of God. It is similar in so far as it really 'is', and thus it forms a union between *Sein* and *Wesen* (Being and nature) and between *Dasein* and *Sosein* (existence and essence); yet it is dissimilar in so far as it does not mean any full identity or any unity consequent upon an inner essential necessity, but only an external, factually posited 'unity of tension'.³⁴

Though the concept of the *analogia entis* does have epistemological

³³ James Zeitz, 'Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy', *Thomist*, Vol 52 (1988), No. 3, 474.

³⁴ Kehl, 'Introduction', 20.

implication, the integration is primarily ontology. Przywara explains: 'Metaphysics, not epistemology is the *prima philosophia*, and within the staring point of the whole philosophy there is already a religious relationship ... Metaphysics at its very foundation cannot be purely theoretical and uninterested, but already has an ethical "decision" character without becoming alogical'.³⁵

On account of its similarity, the finite is to be affirmed and loved because it is a reflection of God. But the concept of analogy grounds the necessity of transcending the finite. There must be a breaking out, as it were, into the absolute transcendent reality of God. In fact, the two sides of the analogy are not of equal importance. The dissimilarity is unequally greater than the similarity. James Zeitz gives us a clear summary of this aspect of Przywara's understanding of the *Analogia Entis*:

... analogy with its ground in the creature maintains a relationship to God as mystery or God 'ever greater'. The God whose 'greater dissimilarity is always beyond every similarity that can be noted between creature and Creator'. It is indeed analogy, but analogy with *moments* - including the creaturely moment of 'being measured out' in a final *analogia attributionis*.³⁶

Thus while the concept of analogy helps Przywara to spell out his formal principle, *Sein in-above Dasein*, it nevertheless portrays a contradiction that is not at all peaceful because it 'always cuts right through the centre of every approximation and similarity ... The dynamic principle of analogy demolishes any merely possible identification of God and the world and points to their continually-increasing

³⁵ Quoted by Zeitz, 'Przywara', 480.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

differentiation'.³⁷ Analogy points to the incomprehensibility of God.

d. *Accents*

From this fundamental infrastructure of Przywara's teaching of the *analogia entis*, Balthasar was able to construct a superstructure, which in principle is very similar to the idea of Przywara, but in application is significantly different, nuanced by the younger Jesuit's own aesthetic theology.

Three salient features mark Balthasar's own development of the analogy of being. The first is his emphasis that every possible relationship between the world and God is founded on the gift of God's relationship as creator to the world. Hence, all movements from the human being to God rest on this relationship. Balthasar untiringly stresses that God's relationship as Creator to his creatures is prior to all relationships. 'Every comparison and relatedness of the creature has therefore its measure in a converse relatedness of God to the creature'.³⁸

Secondly, Balthasar is adamant to defend the value of the creature. Przywara's analogy stresses the 'ever greater' difference between God and creature to the point that it almost cancels out any kind of similarity. By underlining the creature's creational relationship with its Creator, Balthasar wishes to affirm the positivity which the reality of the world has received through this relationship.

Created being must be by definition created, dependent, relative, nondivine, but *as* something created it cannot be utterly dissimilar to its Creator. And if this creature is a spiritual and intellectual being, both its ontic as well as its noetic nature must bear some relation to its Creator. In its thinking, however blinded and rebellious that thinking

³⁷ Kehl, 'Introduction', 20.

³⁸ See Kehl, 'Introduction', 20.

might be, it must be touched by God the Creator, for it has God's *cogito* as the form of its *cogito*. Otherwise it would not even be a creature.³⁹

For Balthasar, 'Adam's loss of the *possession* of grace does not mean that he has thereby lost the *order* of grace (as the supernatural vocation of nature to be redirected to the heights of God).'⁴⁰ He warns against equating 'fallen human nature with some "pure nature" that stands outside the order of grace'.⁴¹

Thus the artificial externalising of grace from nature is removed. Balthasar has given the old dictum of Thomas Aquinas that 'grace presupposes nature; it does not destroy it but completes it', a new interpretation. He writes,

What the formal concept of nature tells us is that everything touched by grace retains its natural side: grace is always a grace in a nature and for a nature. It remains modal to nature and is never substantial. But while this is all true, so is the converse: grace so radically transforms, exalts and irradiates nature with the divine reality that no aspect or corner of nature can escape its impact. Yes, even the most god-forsaken realm - where sin took hold and reigned - was chosen as *the* site for God revelation's of grace in Christ!

This already means that nature *de facto* has only one, single, supernatural end. It means that not only its individual 'acts' but the very seat and centre of these acts - nature itself and its entelechy - must *de facto* be radically transformed, raised up and realigned. There is *in fact* no slice of 'pure nature' in this world.⁴²

Even Karl Barth could not escape or get round this paradox. Here Balthasar points out the apparent contradiction in Barth's thoughts: 'On the one hand, he locked nature up in itself, to the point where it becomes impossible to derive a truly

³⁹ KB, 285.

⁴⁰ KB, 288.

⁴¹ KB, 288.

⁴² KB, 288.

transcendent concept of it. On the other hand, he opened up nature to grace, to the point where he almost deduced ^{our} natural capacities from the event of revelation and the act of faith (Church Dogmatics, 6).⁴³

Balthasar's eagerness to emphasise the correspondence between nature and grace, and to uphold the positivity of the finite must not however lead us to conclude that he has swung to the other extreme, that of allowing the similarity between God and the world to swallow up the dissimilarity. That he is careful to avoid this tendency is seen in the third feature of Balthasar's development of the concept of the *analogia entis*: that in every analogous correspondence between nature and grace both the uniqueness and the incomparability of the definitive self-revelation of God in Christ must be acknowledged.

For Balthasar, Christ is the ground and goal of creation. Therefore the most fundamental reason for the world's aesthetic structure lies in Jesus Christ. He makes this point succinctly in his book *Prayer*.

The whole of creation, surely, and man in particular, was brought into being and ordered in view of Christ. And since Christ is the fulfilment of the cosmos, and the plenitude of the divinity sent into the world, since, too, he fills heaven and earth and gathers them together in himself as Head, surely he is more than the redeemer from sin. It is he who was to take flesh in the middle of time - and not the disincarnate Logos - who is the first born in the mind of God and the 'beginning of the creation of God' (Aoc III.14); and it was in him and in view of him that man was brought into being, compounded of spirit and body.⁴⁴

Hence, while the positive content of the correspondence between the created order of nature and the historical order of salvation means that the order of the

⁴³ KB, 301.

⁴⁴ *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 209.

aesthetic in creation is the vessel within which God unfolds his final revelation to us, this revelation itself cannot be calculated from nature. It is received as a pure gift. The analogy between the two orders leads to an openness for the 'totally other' completion of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. 'The revelation of God in Christ remains - despite every possible demand for it and in every real fulfilment - still the absolutely unimaginable new and other which is already given in no "transcendental experience"'.⁴⁵

e. *Encounter With Barth*

Before we leave our discussion of the principle of analogy, we must pause to examine the significant influence of yet another theologian on Balthasar: Karl Barth. The influence of this Reformed theologian on Balthasar is felt in three important areas of the latter's thinking. The first is his Christocentric theology. The second area is the theology of history. Barth's 'doctrine of universalistic predestination' made a deep impression on Balthasar and acted as a catalyst to his own sketch of the 'theology of history'. Finally, Balthasar was also deeply influenced by Barth's doctrine of the analogy of faith, which seeks to replace the Catholic doctrine of the *analogia entis*.

For Karl Barth, the formula *analogia entis* is the 'invention of the anti-christ' and the single, most convincing reason for not becoming a Catholic. For Balthasar, as we have already seen, this principle is absolutely indispensable, and is the only solution that would enable Christian theology to work responsibly between a philosophy of identity on the one extreme, and an absolute dialectic on the other.

Balthasar argues that over against the 'dialectical' Barth of the *Epistle to the*

⁴⁵ Kehl, 'Introduction', 22.

Romans there is a necessity for a creature-grounded common ground between God and the creature. It is only within this that the contradiction of the sin of the creature can have meaning. Balthasar wrote, 'Every contra presupposes relationship, thus a minimum of common ground in order to be truly contra and not simply unrelated other. Also, only on the basis of analogy is sin possible'.⁴⁶

The dialogue with the Barth of *Church Dogmatics* led Balthasar to agree on the *analogia fidei* without controverting the important role of the *analogia entis*. The analogy of faith for Barth means that only through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ can there be a communion between God and the world. Only in believing in this message does the human being attain a relationship of having something in common with God. Balthasar concurs with Barth's definition of the analogy of faith in the context of the salvation-historical order of redemption in Jesus Christ, and is ready to recognise this form of analogy to be the final form. But he firmly maintains that this relationship presupposes a relationship of creation which is elevated and brought to perfection.

Balthasar was careful to take Barth's claims seriously. He goes beyond Przywara by pointing out not only the weaknesses of Barth's position, but also its strengths. He saw a possible common ground between Barth and Catholic analogy. The excesses of Barth serve as helpful warnings, while Barth's analogy of faith serves as a corrective to the Catholic notion of the *natura pura* which was prevalent in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Balthasar's dependence on the principle of analogy does not blind him to the possible dangers of the misuse of the principle which would be

⁴⁶ Zeitz, 'Przywara', 188.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 489.

epistemologically and theologically disastrous:

Misuse of the analogy consists in simply subjugating and subordinating God's revelation with its own form, to the laws not only of metaphysics and of private, social and sociological ethics but also of this-worldly aesthetics, instead of respecting the sovereignty which is amplified clearly enough in God's work.⁴⁸

4. Aesthetics, Metaphysics and Theology

a. *Aesthetics and Metaphysics*

Balthasar maintains that aesthetics was always seen as an aspect of metaphysics before it was reduced to a science which is confined to a particular area of knowledge. This reduction of aesthetics was the result of the rise of rationalism, seen primarily in the Baumgartenian aesthetics,⁴⁹ and also the rise of Kantian idealism. By metaphysics, Balthasar means the 'science concerned with the being of what exists'.⁵⁰

'Being' is defined as 'that which finally establishes the multiplicity of the world'. The transitory truth and goodness of the world, perceived only in a limited and fragmentary manner, are, according to this view, 'anchored' in the truth and

⁴⁸ GL I:37.

⁴⁹ Though Baumgarten was a rationalist, it is interesting to note his definition of aesthetics. For him aesthetics is a science whose subject, beauty, is a perfection of things that delights only in as much as it has become sensorily perceived. No beauty is rationally knowable, except through confused knowledge. This, for Baumgarten, the science that professionally deals with beauty, must be distinguished from and is the precise contrary opposite of knowledge. He therefore makes a small amendment to the Wolffian division of science: dividing propaedeutic science into logic, which is the science of supersensory knowledge, and aesthetics, the science of sensory knowledge. See Francis J. Kovach, *Philosophy of Beauty* (Morman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 7, 8.

⁵⁰ GL IV:19.

goodness that do not pass away. The beauty that shines forth from the this-worldly and temporal objects is anchored in an absolute beauty that is non transient. According to antiquity, this beauty dwells in the ἀρχαί of being - with the 'gods'.⁵¹ This intuition is called 'transcendental aesthetics' where the καλόν is seen as one of the transcendental determinations of being qua being. The man of antiquity would never separate the transcendently beautiful and the transcendently true and good. Between these there is a *circuminessio*. The beautiful therefore never lacks 'that which is morally sound or the radiance of truth in its work of reconciliation and healing by grace'. Similarly, the medieval thinkers were able, in principle, to hold on to this indwelling, and are able to see simultaneously the unity of the beautiful with the good and true and its distinctiveness.⁵²

Balthasar maintains that biblical revelation can and must enter into dialogue with transcendental aesthetics;⁵³ and though it must criticise all metaphysics, mythical, philosophical and religious,⁵⁴ it nevertheless does not declare it worthless but rather, this metaphysics is 'confirmed in such a way that man sees all his preliminary sketches of systems included and far transcended in the definitive systems of God'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ GL IV:19.

⁵² GL IV:21.

⁵³ GL IV:20.

⁵⁴ GL IV:23-4.

⁵⁵ GL IV:23.

b. *The Importance of the Concept of Form*

No metaphysics of being qua being is separable from concrete experience. This experience is always sensuous in nature. Hence, the 'truth and openness of being as a whole will be seen only where a judgement is made about some precise thing that is true; the goodness of being will be experienced only where something that is good meets one, something that simultaneously brings near the good and (through its finitude, fragility and lack of goodness) takes it away again'.⁵⁶

The concept of form is appropriate to express the reality in which the totality of being presents itself in various degrees of clarity in the individual (temporal) things that exist. The totality of parts requires for its existence, not only a surrounding world but ultimately, being as a whole. Nicholas of Cusa calls this a 'contracted' representation of the absolute. 'And so the absolute being makes use of the form of the world with its duality of language (inalienable finitude of the individual form and unconditional, transcending reference to this individual form to being as a whole) in order to make itself known in its unfathomable personal depths'.⁵⁷

The light that shines forth from the form, the light that reveals it to the understanding, is inseparable from the light of the form itself, the *splendor formae*, and the light of being as a whole. In this sense then, the transcendence increases along with the immanence. To put this in the language of aesthetics, one could say that the higher and purer the form, the more will light shine forth from its depths and the more it will point to the light of being. Seen in the perspective of religion, one could say that the more spiritual a being is, the more it is aware in itself of God, the more

⁵⁶ GL IV:28.

⁵⁷ GL IV:31-32.

it will point to God. This, Balthasar explains, is the fundamental law of metaphysics with which Biblical revelation concurs.⁵⁸

Balthasar frowns on the modern tendency towards the destruction of form. He names the various strands of thought that push in this direction: Bultmann's existentialism, Rahner's anthropocentric transcendentalism, Teilhard's evolutionism, and those who emphasises rhythm alone (here Balthasar parts company with Przywara). Against this, Balthasar maintains, we must preserve the form of revelation - 'for only when we accept the unique incarnation of the Logos can the infinite dimensions of the Pneuma be understood as his glorification (Jn 16:14) and not his dissolution'.⁵⁹

c. *Metaphysics and Theology*

It can be seen from the above discussion that Balthasar is totally opposed to the separation of metaphysics from theology. Theology, as a reflection on the glory of Christian revelation, cannot be undertaken successfully without constant reflection on the subject of metaphysics. Metaphysics here must be seen in the broadest terms. If it narrows its scope, it destroys itself.⁶⁰ Thus the task of metaphysics includes what the Greeks called the 'holy knowledge about the origins of the world' (mythos) and the definition and description of what is ἀληθές ('clear', 'true'), ἀγαθόν ('good') and καλόν ('sound', 'healthy', 'beautiful').

It is from this conviction that Balthasar raises his polemic against Luther,

⁵⁸ GL IV:31.

⁵⁹ GL IV:37.

⁶⁰ GL IV:12.

modern Protestantism, and modern Catholicism. Luther, by limiting himself only to what is biblical, overlooks the beauty of the creation (though it is attested to in the Bible), making it impossible for the glory of grace to overflow into the world of creation because of his disruptive dialectic.⁶¹ In the same way, modern Protestantism obscures the whole dimension of the *καλόν* of the world: 'Christianity can indeed fasten on to catastrophe and bankruptcies, in order to make visible what is distinctive in Christianity itself, but it can never take comfort from such things, imagining that it could occupy painlessly a fortress abandoned by the enemy'.⁶²

This is also true for modern Catholicism, with the exception of a remnant:

And this remains true at a time when for Catholics the period of humanism (understood in the sense of Antiquity), and thereby also the period of metaphysics in the senses in which this has come down to them, appears to have come to an end; when 'the beautiful' seems to belong only to bourgeois comfort which it seems almost indecent to cultivate any longer; when the figures who leave their imprint on the Church for today - Therese of Lisieux, Charles de Foucauld, the worker-priests, many communities living in the world - live the example of Christianity of poverty and of utter exposure to a cold heartless world of technology, a world that at best understands the machines but discards all the other uses of the word as comical or rotten glamour.⁶³

5. Towards a Theological Aesthetics

The task of this section is to examine the formulation of Balthasar's theological aesthetics. Two possible approaches are open to him. The first is to go the way of Karl Barth, that is, to discover the inner beauty of revelation and theology itself. The

⁶¹ *GL* IV:21.

⁶² *GL* IV:62.

⁶³ *GL* IV:27-28.

second is to probe the possibility of a relationship between theological beauty and the beauty of the world, and to establish a genuine encounter between divine revelation and antiquity.⁶⁴ From the epistemological and theological presuppositions already examined, the choice for Balthasar is clear. But first he examines the approaches of those before him who have attempted such an undertaking.

a. *Examination of Some Approaches & Paradigms*

The first to come under his consideration is Johann Georg Hamann, who he describes as a tragic figure; tragic because he remains a figure out of joint with his times. Nevertheless it was Hamann who tried to ‘construct a theory of beauty (*Aesthetica in nuce*) in such a way that, in it, the total aspiration of worldly and pagan beauty is fulfilled while all glory is at the same time given to God in Jesus Christ’.⁶⁵

Standing at the beginning of Idealism, Hamann struggles to ward off the synthesis that entrapped his friends, who later became his intellectual enemies: Shaftesbury and Hume, Lessing, Mendelssohn, Kant, Starck and Herder. This is the synthesis that resulted from the Enlightenment where ‘the beautiful could be regarded as being the primal nature of the world itself, in its sensualness and even in all its sensuousness and eroticism’.⁶⁶ Hamann breaks away from this. To him nature has been alienated from its origin. The ‘aesthetic’ and even enlightened reason are both tinged with original sin. ‘Only Christ and God’s Word in him in the form of suffering (the hiddenness *sub contrario*), the historical word of Scripture reveals anew God’s

⁶⁴ GL I:80.

⁶⁵ GL I:80-81.

⁶⁶ GL I:81.

glory'.⁶⁷ Hamann sees the glory as kenosis which occurred not only in the incarnation of the Son, but also in the creative activities of the Father, and in the work of the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the 'aesthetic obedience of the Cross'. The folly of the cross is manifested vicariously, and it is in this that he finds access to the primal beauty of man's existence. Balthasar explains:

Now, it is in the folly of the cross that Hamann finds access to the primal beauty of our existence, to the archetypal power of the genuine, creating Word, and, finally, access to the innermost, mysterious core of all reality: the bridal unity of Christ, the God-Logos, with his fallen and dismembered Body, which, in death, he again takes home to himself: 'The unity of the Head, as well as the disjunction of the Body ... is the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven from its genesis to the apocalypse. It is the focal point of all parables and types in the entire universe - the *histoire generale* and the *chronique scandaleuse* of all ages'.⁶⁸

But Hamann did not make an impact with his aesthetics because of the prevailing influence of the Enlightenment. Balthasar describes vividly this tragic failure:

But to whom could Hamann have sold such an aesthetics at that later hour? Everyone respected him; no one understood his concerns. His light was extinguished, not only by being outshone by the brilliance of Weimar, then entering its own noonday - the Weimar for which his only disciple, Herder, has deserted him; his light was extinguished in himself, in the smothering darkness of his own expression, which became increasingly more compressed and compacted to the point of incomprehensibility. The times abandoned him, and another century and a half was required until Ebner, Buber and Haecker rediscovered his theology of language.⁶⁹

Balthasar then examines the thoughts of Johann Gottfried Herder, poet, theologian and philosopher, who attempted to construct the indispensable bridge

⁶⁷ GL I:81-82.

⁶⁸ GL I:82-83.

⁶⁹ GL I:83.

between poetry and theology, or the philosophy of nature and history and a religious psychology.

Herder declares himself an enemy of the Enlightenment whose arid reason and concepts kill the soul. The soul is described as consisting of feeling, sensibility, the will and deed; and is defined as a unity of a surging 'force' and the 'image' that it pours forth. This was later named as the 'power of the imagination' by Idealism and Romanticism. It is with this 'power of the imagination' that Herder approaches the Bible.

Two fundamental principles guided Herder's study of the Bible. The first is that the Bible is as a whole, poetry, and can therefore be reconstructed only as a world of images. The second is that the Bible is the most ancient and purest document of mankind, and, as such, stands in the sharpest contrast with all other forms of literature. The language that expresses the simplicity and truth of the Bible can be characterised as being the 'origin of all myth', and as being both primal myth and super myth.

According to Herder, if the Bible is read correctly, it is the manifestation of all beauty and truth which is scattered throughout humanity. Balthasar, however, unravels a serious reductionism in the thought of Herder:

Not only is the Bible this - for Herder: it is also nothing but this. When Herder reads the Bible, even the miracle and Resurrection narratives in the NT, he refuses to see in it anything but the highest possibilities of man as such.⁷⁰

Balthasar's comments on Herder's late work *God* provides us with some telling and perceptive insights on Herder's theological position:

⁷⁰ *GL* I:88-89.

The amphibolies of the later work *God* are well-known, a work in which Herder turns his back on Jacobi and declares himself for Spinoza - a Spinoza, of course, that he has brought into harmony with his own understanding of Christianity. Herder's ambiguities in this work are but one expression of the great amphiboly between pantheism and Christianity that pervades the whole age, from Fichte and Schelling to Hegel: the fluid identification of the natural and the supernatural which both 'humanised' Christianity and failed to hear its true message. And we must ask ourselves at this point whether, instead of these aesthetic harmonies, we would not prefer to hear the trenchant antitheses of a Schiller and, later, of a Marx and a Kierkegaard ...⁷¹

We have seen that Herder, and certainly the German classical and Romantic idealism after him, posited an identity between aesthetic humanism and Christianity. The unfortunate result of this, as Balthasar has correctly described, is the humanisation of Christianity, which in turn resulted in an inability to hear its true message. The aesthetic apologetics of Rene de Chateaubriand however is significantly different. As a Catholic, Chateaubriand 'must preserve the difference in levels (*Gefälle*) between Christian revelation and beauty'.⁷² Geniality, according to Chateaubriand, is the worldly expression through which Christianity makes its appearance in culture. It is possible and even desirable for one to find one's way from this expression back to the heart or essence of Christianity.

The criterion for all truth, that is, both divine and human truth, as well as natural and supernatural truth, for Chateaubriand, is beauty. It is this beauty that produces and develops harmony in man. In his writings, he traces the thoughts of those who have anticipated his method: from Justin, Arnobius, Lactantius, Origen, and Augustine to Pascal, François de Sales, and Fénelon.⁷³

⁷¹ *GL* I:90.

⁷² *GL* I:91.

⁷³ *GL* I:92.

The problem with Chateaubriand's method, as Balthasar saw it, was his standard of beauty.

The 'beauty' which is supposed to serve as criterion for the latter is set too low by Chateaubriand. In his work, the world of revelation does not bring with itself its own criterion, and its beauty, a criterion and a beauty by which man, the world and culture could measure themselves. The point of reference lies, at best, in the harmony between nature and supernature, but for the most part is to be found in nature, in its own satisfaction and development. Chateaubriand's points of view are correct and possible in the Christian sense, but they are not sufficient.⁷⁴

We move on to the next model, the aesthetics of Alois G  gler, whom Balthasar credited with having brought 'romantic aesthetic theology to its perfection'.⁷⁵ For G  gler, the revelation of God in his creation is 'natural as to its depth'. To the *sensorium* that perceives this depth, the work appears as God's 'impassioning and enrapturing work of art'. All peoples bear witness to this primal experience in their art.⁷⁶

Herein lies the decisive feature of G  gler's theology: the relationship between Biblical revelation and extra-biblical art. This relationship is described by Balthasar as the relationship 'between what is original and what is already in decline, between the proper order of reality and the progressive alienation from that reality'.⁷⁷

Several advantages can be gleaned from this conception of the continuity between revelation and art. The first is the 'redeemability' of that which is outside the Bible as it is drawn and taken into the reality of the revelation in Jesus Christ. The

⁷⁴ GL I:94.

⁷⁵ GL I:94.

⁷⁶ GL I:95.

⁷⁷ GL I:97.

second is the applicability of the universal phenomena of life, nature and history to the interpretation of Christian revelation. And, finally, the isolationist historical 'positivism' of Biblical revelation is avoided.

But these advantages do not mean that G gler's system was successful in presenting a theological aesthetics. G gler's ambiguity, his failure to achieve a clear definition of his underlying concept of art was the reason for his failure. Though G gler's work represents the most significant achievements of Catholic Romanticism and announces powerfully the aesthetic concerns of theology, it failed because it did not provide an adequate account of his analogical method, nor was he able to on the basis of his schema of Romantic categories. Balthasar concludes:

Romantic theology ultimately failed because of a deep theological inadequacy, namely, that it did not sufficiently distinguish between creation and revelation, or, to formulate it in terms of our enquiry, we can say that Romantic theology foundered on a kind of aesthetic and religious monism.⁷⁸

It was in the theology of Matthias Joseph Scheeben that Balthasar found the true signs of the replacing of the 'aesthetic theology' of Romanticism 'with the outlines of a methodically founded "Theological aesthetics"'.⁷⁹ Scheeben's theological methodology signals a decisive turning away from the Idealist aesthetic theology to the theology that is significantly more positive and 'scientific' on the one hand, and on the other, because of his strong aesthetic inclinations is able to give this 'scientific' theology an aesthetic shape.

An important feature of Scheeben's aesthetic theology is its understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. Against the pantheism of Romantic

⁷⁸ *GL* I:104.

⁷⁹ *GL* I:105.

theology, Scheeben was adamant that the separation between nature and supernature should be maintained. Supernature is not 'a moment in nature by which God brings it (nature) to perfection'.⁸⁰ Neither can nature claim to strive positively after supernature and to assert certain rights to it. In a single, penetrating motion of his thought, Scheeben has successfully severed 'all connecting lines that naturally lead from below into the Realm above ...'⁸¹

The world of grace is the world of God, who through the revelation of himself has created nature has granted it a share of his own substance and nature. Thus revelation, for Scheeben, is salvific: it means 'the transporting of man from his own immanent and finite sphere into the divine, transcendental, and infinite sphere'.⁸² God's plan for the world then is the 'glorification' and 'transfiguration' of nature. 'For every creature this is the supernatural, freely given "ideal", an ideal which is necessary because it is really conferred, an ideal which is the 'principle and goal" of all participation in God'.⁸³

Perhaps the main weaknesses in Scheeben's theological design is its ahistoricity and its trivialisation of the fallenness of man:

The only thing that we can take exception to in Scheeben is a certain ahistoricity in his theological design. This trait is intimately connected with the polemical and negative impulse with which he began. His standpoint is grace, which means that the sin and fallenness of worldly existence are seen to be realities only very indirectly ... How could we, however, understand the 'beauty' of the Cross without the abysmal

⁸⁰ *GL* I:105.

⁸¹ *GL* I:105.

⁸² *GL* I:106.

⁸³ *GL* I:110.

darkness into which the Crucified plunges?⁸⁴

b. *Theological Aesthetics: Its Tasks and Structure*

The above study serves the dual purpose of providing guidance and warning. From it Balthasar is now able to determine the task and structure of a theological aesthetics, which he defines as a theology ‘which does not primarily work with the extra-theological categories of a worldly philosophical aesthetics (above all poetry), but which develops its theory of beauty from the data of revelation itself with genuine theological methods’.⁸⁵

The two elements that traditionally control every aesthetics, *species* and *lumen* provide the basic infrastructure to Balthasar’s own theological aesthetics. As form, the beautiful can be materially grasped. But the form is the appearing ‘of a depth and a fullness that, in themselves and in an abstract sense, remain beyond both our reach and our vision’.⁸⁶ As revelation, the appearance of the form is the union of two things: (a) the real appearance of the depths, and (b) a pointing beyond itself to these depths.

The person who truly beholds the form is transported to the depths to which the form points:

We ‘behold’ the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being. We are ‘enraptured’ by our contemplation of these depths and are being transported to them. But so long as we are dealing with the

⁸⁴ GL I:116-117.

⁸⁵ GL I:117.

⁸⁶ GL I:118.

beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths.⁸⁷

The formulation that is of vital importance to Balthasar's theological aesthetics and theological epistemology is *Quia per incarnati Verbi mysterium nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilia amorem rapiamur*.⁸⁸

Two things are implicit in this formulation. Firstly, the 'eyes of our mind' are struck by a 'new light'. This enables us to know visibly, i.e., contemplatively (*visibiliter*). And secondly, the object of that knowledge is God, but God as he is mediated (*per*) by the mystery of the Incarnation (*incarnati Verbi mysterium*). A 'mediating vision' occasions a 'rapture' and a 'transport' (*rapiamur*) to a love (*amor*) of the things that are invisible (*invisibilia*). These 'unseen things' however have already been announced by the visibleness and revelation of the Incarnation.⁸⁹

From this text Balthasar's theological epistemology and the structure of his theological aesthetics can be summarily outlined. First, there is an emphasis on sight, that is, on the 'beholding'. Hearing and believing, Balthasar maintains, are implied in the text. Balthasar uses the word 'perception' (*Wahrnehmung*) to give expression to this 'beholding'. The word perception here is used in a 'strong sense of a "taking to oneself" (*nehmen*) of something true (*Wahres*) which is offering itself'.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *GL* I:119.

⁸⁸ See *GL* I:119-120. 'Because through the mystery of the incarnate Word the new light of your brightness has shone onto eyes of our mind; that knowing God visibly, we might be snatched up by this into the love of invisible things'.

⁸⁹ *GL* I:120.

⁹⁰ *GL* I:120.

Secondly, a 'new light' is expressly required. This light illumines the form. 'In this way, the "new light" will at the same time make seeing the form possible and be itself seen along with the form'.⁹¹

Thirdly, man is not addressed in a total mystery. Though the splendour of mystery cannot be equated with the aesthetic radiance of the world, it is at the same time not beyond any and every comparison. Something is offered to man by God, 'in such a way that man can see it, understand it, make it his own, and live from it in keeping with his human nature'.⁹² Man, under such a condition, comes to a true realisation. But there is yet another sense in which man is active in this movement. Man responds to the movement through his Christian *Eros*, a concept which he borrowed from Denys the Areopagite:

But the whole truth of this mystery is that the movement which God (who is the object that is seen in Christ and who enraptures man) effects in man (even in his unwillingness and recalcitrance, due to sin) is co-effected willingly by man through his Christian *eros* and, indeed, on account of the fact that the divine Spirit enthuses and in-spires man to collaboration.⁹³

c. *Some Conclusions*

From the above summary, some important conclusions can be reached. The first concerns the indispensability of God's revelation in Jesus Christ in any theological epistemology. Balthasar takes care to emphasise this point: 'just as we can never attain to the living God in any way except through his Son become man, so,

⁹¹ GL I:120.

⁹² GL I:121.

⁹³ GL I:121.

too, we ought never to speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation-history'.⁹⁴

Secondly, since we are to be transported *per hunc (Deum visibilem) in invisibilium amorem*, we are not to equate God's own beauty and glory with the beauty of his epiphany. Neither are we to try to discover God's beauty by a mere causal inference from the beauty of his epiphany, as this would mean that eventually we will leave this epiphany behind.⁹⁵

Thirdly, it follows that our *excessus* to God must involve a *Theologica negativa* without ever detaching itself from a *theologica positiva*. A theological aesthetic must be both apophatic and cataphatic in its approaches.

Thus, a theological aesthetics must be developed in two phases:

1. The Theory of Vision (fundamental theology), which Balthasar defines as "aesthetics" in the Kantian sense as a theory of perception of the form of God's revelation'.

2. The Theory of Rapture (dogmatic theology), which Balthasar defines as "aesthetics", a theory about the Incarnation of God's glory and the consequent elevation of man to participate in that glory'.⁹⁶

There can be no separation between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology, or between the theory of vision and the theory of rapture. Let us listen to Balthasar's own words as he explains the dynamism of this union:

To be sure, there is a road which the human spirit takes as it seeks for

⁹⁴ GL I:124.

⁹⁵ GL I:124.

⁹⁶ GL I:125.



the Christian truth (*intellectus quaerens fidem*), and this search may be fostered by variously showing and making visible in an appropriate way the form of God's revelation, which conceals itself from the eyes of the world and of salvation history *sub contrario*, as Luther has it. As we have said, however, this road itself already stands in the rays of the divine light, a light which, in an objective sense, makes the form visible and which, in a subjective sense, clarifies and illumines the searching spirit, thus training it in an act and a *habitus* which will become perfect faith once the vision has itself been perfected. In 'dogmatics', moreover, this developing (*wachsende*) and now adult (*erwachsene*) faith continues to grow (*wächst*) as a *fides quaerens intellectum*.⁹⁷

The vision behind Balthasar's theological aesthetics, as we have seen, is the re-integration of grace and nature, culture and theology within a comprehensive theological reflection on form. The *analogia entis* is the dominant principle that motivates and guides his vision. In a key passage on his approach we read these words: 'The fundamental principle of a theological aesthetics, rather, is the fact that, just as this Christian revelation is absolute truth and goodness, so also is it absolute beauty; but this assertion would be meaningless if every transposition and application to revelation of human categories from the realms of logic, ethics ('pragmatics') and aesthetics, if every analogical application of these categories were simply forbidden'.⁹⁸ He concludes the passage by asserting that 'the categories of aesthetics are not simply annihilated, but rather raised above themselves in an incomprehensibly positive way ... in order to contain something which is infinitely greater than themselves'.⁹⁹ The task of the next two chapters is Balthasar's revelation theology and theological epistemology in the light of the presuppositions discussed in this chapter.

⁹⁷ GL I:126.

⁹⁸ GL I:607.

⁹⁹ GL I:610.

CHAPTER II

REVELATION AND EXPERIENCE I: THE UNFOLDING OF THE FORM

1. Man's Need Of Revelation

Our study of Balthasar's theological methodology and epistemology so far should enable us to at least anticipate his standpoint regarding man's longing and search for the divine, and the free, unique and complete self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ. His is the standpoint which sees God at work outside the boundaries of positive historical revelation, in the world of mythology and the philosophical and religious aspirations of mankind, without annulling the positive character of revelation and the work of the church which bears witness to this revelation, nor resulting in a unified history of the revelation of God in the world as is often the case with German Idealism and Romanticism.¹ It is a standpoint that allows the Christian requirement of penitence and conversion and obedient listening to the word a central place without overlooking the Catholic and Orthodox requirement of 'giving glory in contemplation'.² It is a standpoint that sees the revelation of Christ as something^{1 2} which simultaneously takes on 'form' and radically destroys all 'beauty and form' in him. The concept of 'glory', so fundamental in the Bible, must, for Balthasar, have an analogy in the general intellectual sphere of mankind. This intuition, fostered by his Catholic roots, is no doubt confirmed again and again through his study of literature and philosophy in Feldkirch and his doctoral research which brought him to Vienna, Berlin and Zurich, and which resulted in his dissertation *Apocalypse der*

¹ GL IV:15.

² GL IV:15.

deutschen Seele, Volumes I-III (1929).³

a. *Man's Longing For God: Mythological*

The world of myth is that 'bright sphere of existence that opens up in its light the distinction between heaven and earth, between gods and men'.⁴ Myth rests on tradition and is received in faith; it is this faith that issues forth prayer and results in the formation of cultic rituals which are understood as acts of faith.⁵ In his study of the Greek classics, Balthasar first examines the poems of Homer whose writings effervesce with the thoughts about God in an intensity and frequency which is hitherto unmatched by any other poetry of world literature. God's presence, power and benevolence capture the author's thought and imagination and is the sole inspiration behind his work. Also in no other poetry is there so much prayer, thanksgiving, sacrifice and vow.⁶ His thoughts portray a high level of sophistication in that on the one hand he insists on the irremovable separation between God and man, thereby purifying the traditional notions of the divine, purging it of an unhealthy preoccupation with the demonic and the magical and giving it 'a pure and shining form that corresponds to his inner vision of God and man'.⁷ And on the other, he spoke of man's transcendence by which he enters, as it were, into the sphere of God,

³ See Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of his life', *Communio*, Vol 16 (3), 1989, 309.

⁴ *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 391. Henceforth referred to as *ET*.

⁵ *GL* IV:155.

⁶ *GL* IV:49.

⁷ *GL* IV:74.

where he finds salvation and his original greatness and glory.⁸ Amidst the plethora of gods in the Greek pantheon stands Zeus, the father of men and gods, who is worshipped as the absolute and almighty lord.⁹ Man is in need of God because he is 'ephemeral': he is bound to the contrariety and exigencies of the temporal world and is subjected to these ambiguities to the point that he can no longer trust himself.¹⁰ Only the indwelling of God in man could raise him from his mortal lowliness and cause him to be so transfigured that he becomes at once both good and beautiful.¹¹ Of this man has no control but is subjected to the sovereignty of the gods; 'for it belongs to the gods to elevate the ephemeral man into the form of gods or to humble him into the form of a servant'.¹²

The writings of Pindar correspond remarkably to the Homeric world-view in which the divine and human are so opposed that there can be no possibility of confusion, and of man's surge towards transcendence, a striving to reach beyond himself into the divine light.¹³ As a lyric poet who understands his art almost entirely as a form of glory, Pindar sees total glory as the glory of 'that which transfigures and that which is transfigured' - the glory of God and that of the world.¹⁴ His poetry is the celebration of the noble man, a man who 'hunger(s) for that which is highest,

⁸ *GL* IV:45.

⁹ *GL* IV:64.

¹⁰ *GL* IV:53.

¹¹ *GL* IV:51.

¹² *GL* IV:54.

¹³ *GL* IV:91-92.

¹⁴ *GL* IV:90-91.

though within reach, in accordance with the measure of his own status'.¹⁵ In his relationship with the gods, man should always possess the 'humility' to resign himself to the 'immeasurability' and 'ephemerality' of human existence, an attitude which will not only give honour to the god but also ensure man his abiding aid and support. Victory is seen as divine grace, a gift of the gods.¹⁶ We see in Pindar's writings a world which is aptly described as 'an aristocracy of spirit' where all that is noble and precious, including all contest and daring, is triumphantly arrayed in 'the immense complex of cosmic celebration'.¹⁷ This world can indeed be deepened 'into the God-man who contains in his triumph both death and life, victory and defeat: anointed not for an earthly but for an eternal contest and celebration'.¹⁸ But Pindar's pre-occupation with nobility and glory has caused him to censor all reflections about the reality of suffering and death and that which is deemed as commonplace and mean: '... not suffering and death. Nor common everyday existence with its philistinism ... Insignificance, baseness and ugliness might catch a gleam from it but then there is the discriminating, excluding act of the poet'.¹⁹

Into this already complex and often scintillating world, the world of Homer, enters a movement so ominous that Grecian art is said to culminate in it and collapse after it, a movement which saw a proliferation of attempts made to define it, but has,

¹⁵ *GL* IV:94.

¹⁶ *GL* IV:94.

¹⁷ *GL* IV:100.

¹⁸ *GL* IV:100.

¹⁹ *GL* IV:100.

in the final analysis, defied all verbal definitions: the Greek Tragedy.²⁰ Tragedy emerged from the world of religious rituals, and its origins, however impenetrable they may be, can be said to lie in the worship of Dionysus. What is central to our present concern is that the tragedy portrays human existence in the zone where its finitude, beauty and ambivalences are affirmed, a zone in which he is not understood as a god but stands in the 'light of the gods and is interpreted from this sphere alone'.²¹ It is surprising that even in this season of change, the tragedians' world-view is, in the main, akin to that of Homer, and the Homeric doctrines of the aseity of God, and man's devotion to the divine continue to receive attention and creative elaboration.²² The remoteness of God causes man to depend more and more on signs, oracles and prophetic dreams which, for the tragedians, 'possess the power of history and are humbly and hungrily believed'.²³ The predicament of man is riddled by the same ambivalence and precariousness seen in Homer. 'Man can turn and twist whichever way he will, still he suffers, and the fact of his accusing the gods in his suffering is itself part of that suffering'.²⁴

Three central themes seem to stand out in Balthasar's study of the Greek classics. (1) Existence is tragic because what Balthasar calls the 'essential lines'

²⁰ *GL* IV:101.

²¹ *ET* III:392.

²² *GL* IV:102.

²³ *GL* IV:107.

²⁴ *GL* IV:105-106.

cannot be met.²⁵ (2) The essential lines are not only unfulfillable, but they often turn human existence into a contradiction. In this contradictoriness, human existence becomes absolute pain.²⁶ (3) At the very soul of this contradiction lies a deep impenetrable sense of guilt. This sense of guilt can neither be easily described or located. Without exonerating the individual, this guilt stretches beyond into a collective doom. But for rooting out his entire existence, there seem to be no way out of this dilemma. Many solutions - asceticism, divination, stoic submission and dependence on divine intervention, are offered, but none of them appears to be final.

b. *Man's Longing For God: Philosophical*

The realm of philosophy is related to the realm of myth because philosophy too is that act in which man reaches out after the whole of being which is an act of transcendence.²⁷ The question as to how far knowledge extends could no longer be suppressed. Knowledge is 'that for which man possesses the criteria for verification

²⁵ 'The love between man and woman exists, yet Admetus is called away from the wedding feast into death: his loving wife, Alcestis, places herself freely and vicariously at death's disposal in order to save her beloved, but now it is Admetus who has been robbed, and, since his beloved has died and left him, life has lost in splendour for him too. Dignity exists, but it is humbled, trampled into the dust and stamped down until the last depth of indignity is reached: thus Queen Hecuba with her daughters is distributed like merchandise among the victors before the burning Troy. Faithfulness exists, but it is outmaneuvered by Sophocles' Deinaneira, who send her husband Hercules the shirt of Nessus, and, indeed, it is made a fool by a demon of madness in Euripides' Hercules, precisely when the hero comes to set his oppressed family free, so that in madness he himself kills his family'. *ET* III:393.

²⁶ 'Orestes explicitly obeys the god Apollo when he kills his mother Clytemnestra because she has murdered her husband, but for this he is handed over to the Furies. Antigone obeys the unwritten law of love for one's relations when she buries her dead brother, but for this she is buried alive by the one who watches over the law of the city, who had forbidden this - yet no god intervenes'. *ET* III:394.

²⁷ *GL* IV:155.

in himself, in his reason', and since the time of Plato 'that undertaking that plots the limits to what reason can achieve in its investigations' is called philosophy.²⁸

The central question of all philosophy is this: 'Has the act of transcendence already found the transcendent object?' Is it, as act, therefore one with the object or not? Is the light in which we accomplish the act of transcendence identical with the illumination of transcendence?'²⁹ The answer to this question is in the negative. This is because reason which inquires about being is a 'monological' act: the dialogical act of prayer is excluded.³⁰ Reason, which wants to assert the validity of its own transcendence into being, must 'methodically suspend the act of glorifying God'.³¹

Thus in the hands of philosophy, the essence of the divine is interpreted in three stages. Firstly, that it is unconditioned and ungrounded and only as such related to the world. We see this in Plato: though the absolute is seen as the 'idea of the good' and the radiant sun, it cannot be presented as personal love. Love always falls on the side of the person yearning for God and never the reciprocal act that proceeds from the divine itself. Secondly, that the absolute can have no antithesis. The world is full of conflict and antithesis, and in its existence in finitude, it is antithetical to God. But God himself knows no antithesis. Thus Xenophanes sought to strip the early notions of God from all human fabrications,³² while Parmenides transposed, in a single sweep, his doctrine of the One God 'into the philosophical doctrine of the one

²⁸ *GL* IV:155.

²⁹ *GL* IV:155.

³⁰ *GL* IV:156.

³¹ *GL* IV:156.

³² *GL* IV:156.

being'.³³ For Heraclitus, God was 'that which rests in change', a notion which at once embraces and transcends the antitheses so that for him the renunciation of myth is complete.³⁴ Plotinus presses this to its completion by asserting that the 'One' is the fount of all love and insight, but is itself not a loving 'Thou'. This leads to the last stage when the absolute, which continues to be the object of all human striving and goal, disappears into the inexpressible. The absolute becomes the 'Thou-less' so that those who wish to obtain it must also leave their personal being behind them and press forward into that which is without antithesis. Barth is surely right when he said that philosophical mysticism is the true reversal to atheism. 'The countless absolute becomes a logical form (Hegel), a law of process (Marx), and the whole centre of gravity slips back to a quasi-divine interhuman love (Feuerbach)'.³⁵

c. *The Inconclusiveness of Man's Search for God*

The attempt to bring about a synthesis between philosophy and myth, an attempt that can be summarised under the by-word 'religion',³⁶ is another expression of humanity's openness to the Other, an openness quintessential to the mythical consciousness of man. Religion is always something more than pure philosophy, and its attempt to grasp this led it to make its own borrowings from myth. But this dialectic is ever-present and never fully resolved in the religious aspirations of man.

It follows that one can start from the foundation of human personal

³³ GL IV:157.

³⁴ GL IV:161.

³⁵ ET III:26.

³⁶ GL IV:217.

existence in the call made by love and the answer made to love to formulate something like an a priori postulate for the form of religion. This postulate, however, cannot generate of itself a concrete sketch of this form, because a dialectic (between 'heart' and 'reason') seems necessarily to dissolve continually every form that is given a definite shape: the heart (Pascal) demands a God as 'Thou' and an absolute love between both; but the reason forbids us to conceive of God as such a 'thou', since he must be absolute (and therefore without needs) and transcends a priori every tension between opposite terms, so that he is to be understood at best as the anonymous totality of goodness that pours itself out without jealousy, but not as that which addresses us in personal terms and awakens us to personhood.³⁷

The idea of God remains uncompleted for humanity. It cannot do without either of the two points of departure, and yet it cannot successfully construct a bridge between the two pillars. Balthasar concludes,

The *God of Israel*, with his first historical act of salvation, lays the basis of that unity of the idea of God that man seeks in vain to grasp - indeed, man seeks in vain to grasp it even as a possible idea. God shows himself here to be mighty and gracious one, by 'going to seek' a people (Dt 4:34) and 'choosing' it (Dt 7:6); and in the act of addressing it and choosing and saving it (out of Egypt), he first of all creates, and establishes this people as subject and partner. On the side of Israel, there is no merit, no excellence (Dt 7:7, 8:17), and it becomes what it is through God's address: the 'people for Yahweh'. The reason for the election is unfathomable love (Dt 7:7, 9), which can be answered only by total, unlimited love (Dt 6:5). The core of the 'I' becomes the core of the 'Thou'. The event is unique, as David expresses it in astonishment: 'What other nation on earth is like your people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his people ... by driving out before his people a nation and its gods?' (2 Sam 7:23). On the basis of the uniqueness of the event, the event of a total love without any preconditions, which as such reveals omnipotence (since God could just as well have chosen another people, for all 'belong to him' and are 'as nothing before him' (Is 40:17), the one who makes election shows himself to be the only one (Is 43:10-12): the absoluteness being.³⁸

³⁷ ET III:28.

³⁸ ET III:28.

d. *Theological A Priori of the Philosophical Beauty*

The Christian event, then, 'ushers in a completely new experience of the divine glory'. The Christian event is not only an 'additional dimension to what mankind already know of glory; it completely transforms it', so that the Christian experience is not one of newness but of uniqueness.³⁹ This does not mean that there is no continuity whatsoever with humanity's 'seeking after God'. Indeed, once Christianity has spent the first century proclaiming and establishing its distinctiveness, in its proclamation to the world of antiquity, it introduces itself as the gracious fulfilment of all humanity's quest for God: 'What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you' (Acts 17:23). 'So the new, without renouncing its demands for penitence and conversion, was first seen predominantly in terms of fulfilment (a tendency which in the Middle Ages even increased) ...'⁴⁰

Three great themes from antiquity pass over into the Christian almost unbroken: the first is the theme of procession and return of creatures from God and back to God. The second theme is that of *eros* understood as 'the fundamental yearning of the finite creature for transcendence in God as the primordial unity, the primordial beauty ...' This theme is applied by Philo in his exposition of the lives of the men in the Old Testament, by Gregory of Nyssa in his commentary on the Song of Songs, by Augustine in his exposition of the deep and restless *desiderium* of the

³⁹ GL IV:317.

⁴⁰ GL IV:319. Balthasar opines that from opposite directions the Renaissance and the Reformation destroyed this configuration. The Renaissance, with its zeal for antiquity. 'dissolved the Christian glory into an all-embracing cosmic revelation (which was then perfected in the Enlightenment)', while the Reformation, with its stress on the distinctiveness of Biblical glory, causes cosmic glory to fade and disappear. Cf. GL IV:323.

creature's need for the God of love 'and thus extends throughout the Middle Ages in the form, shimmering in a multitude of shades in Bernard, William of St Thierry and Richard of St Victor, and again in Dante, Petrarch, Ficino and Michaelangelo'.⁴¹ And thirdly, the theme of the beauty of the soul, a theme which is seen in Plato and Plotinus, a theme so courageous and 'world affirming', 'which does not mourn the passing of physical beauty in a melancholy vein, but dares to see it as the reflection and sensuous image of a deeper, indestructible glory'.⁴² Hence Balthasar can write that

Christians feel themselves to be the legitimate heirs of all revelation of God in the world (Homer, Aristotle), of all reference to and exposition of God by man (the tragedians), of all loving assent to God and attachment to the Absolute (Plato, Stoic), every homecoming of the creature to the One (Plotinus), every courageous pilgrimage, full of renunciation, through time towards a future *civitas* (Virgil).⁴³

2. The Form of God's Revelation

In this section we shall examine Balthasar's understanding of God's revelation in the world and his particular revelation in the person of Jesus Christ.

a. *The Objective Evidence of Revelation*

In the previous chapter we saw that the concept of form occupies a central place in the theological aesthetics of Balthasar. There is no need here to rehearse again his reasons for this. The burden of this section is to show how this concept is

⁴¹ GL IV:321-2.

⁴² GL IV:322.

⁴³ GL IV:321.

related to his understanding of revelation, and how we may then talk of the objectivity of God's revelation.

Balthasar gives three reasons why God's revelation must have an objective form. The first has to do with the essential difference between God and the world, between Creator and creature. Because of this difference 'even the most intimate self-disclosure of God in the soul has a "form", even if it is spiritual: the form of experience, sensations and illuminations, which are not the self-disclosing God Himself'.⁴⁴ Balthasar goes on to add that even this spiritual form is preceded by our 'contact with God as we approach him through the worldly and material condition', and that we can know 'nothing of a pure communication between the two interiorities'.⁴⁵

The time has come to us to take a closer look at Balthasar's understanding of revelation in terms of the older classifications of 'general' and 'special' revelation, or, to use Balthasar's own terminologies, the 'revelation of creation' and the 'revelation of grace'. This apparent 'excursus' is necessary since it will lead us logically to Balthasar's second reason why God's revelation must have an objective form.

Balthasar sees the two 'kinds' of revelation not as a contradiction. The two are continuous. The revelation of grace is not the 'establishment of a new form within the created world', rather it is a new 'manner' of God's presence in the 'form of the world'.⁴⁶ Thus the 'revelation of nature' becomes a 'cipher-code' of the world's Being by which natural religion abide: it is the only word which it receives from...

⁴⁴ GL I:430.

⁴⁵ GL I:430.

⁴⁶ GL I:452.

God.⁴⁷ The distinction between this and what is usually called 'special' or 'supernatural' revelation, Balthasar maintains, is found in intention: 'the first word was directed to man as creature that had come forth from God, and the second word addresses him personally as a child of God's grace and calls him home to the heart of God'.⁴⁸ There is thus a continuous relationship between the two even though the second signals a 'new intimacy' in our union with God, an intimacy that is characterised by the fact that the child of God now has access to that in which he participates.⁴⁹ In the light of this, Balthasar warns against the careless and flippant treatment of general revelation in which one glosses quickly over it in order to focus on the revelation of grace, to the extent that the former is even denied'.⁵⁰ 'It is as creature that man first come to know the ever greater and, thus, ever-more-hidden God as his Lord'.⁵¹

Now, if God first revealed himself as Creator and if creation is indeed the manifestation of God, it follows that 'this manifestation takes its form from the world itself'.⁵² This is Balthasar's second reason for the objective evidence of God's revelation. He supports this assertion by citing Romans 1:19f where the apostle Paul wrote with precision: 'Whatever can be known about God is manifest in them, for God has revealed it to them. For since the creation of the world, what is invisible of

⁴⁷ *GL* I:449.

⁴⁸ *GL* I:449.

⁴⁹ *GL* I:452.

⁵⁰ *Word and Revelation: Essays in Theology I*, 58.

⁵¹ *GL* I:449.

⁵² *GL* I:430.

God - I mean God's eternal power and divinity - has become intelligible through the things he has made'. On account of this Balthasar insists that God in his entirety is manifested in creation. This 'divinity of the invisible' that radiates in the Being of the world is 'glory' (*Herrlichkeit*) or 'sublimeness' (*Herrlichkeit, Schlier*) and *δοξα*, 'God's intransitoriness'. Though Balthasar repeatedly stresses that this is the glory of God and not of the world, he maintains that this should in no way preclude 'God's *δοξα* from radiating and "being seen" (*καθορραται*) in and through the form of the world'.⁵³

From the form of the revelation in the world, Balthasar moves on to the form of revelation in Christ which is for him the perfection of the former on the one hand, and on the other, a revelation which is totally unique. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ must therefore neither be seen as a prolongation or an intensification of the revelation in creation. Instead it must be considered only from the standpoint of God's ultimate plan. So considered the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the fulfilment or culmination of the revelatory forms of the world. 'Beyond all creaturely hope and expectations ... the revelation in Christ was to bring together in one divine and human head everything heavenly and earthly, which is thus endowed by grace with a crown the radiance of whose glory, belonging to the Kyrios of the world, was to shed its rays over the whole of creation'.⁵⁴ The form of revelation is not the appearance as 'the limitation (*περας*) of an infinite non-form (*ἄπειρον*), but the appearance of an infinitely determined super-form'.⁵⁵ We will study Balthasar's exposition of the form

⁵³ *GL* I:431.

⁵⁴ *GL* I:432.

⁵⁵ *GL* I:432.

of Jesus Christ in greater detail in the following pages; for the moment, it is important for us to bring this salient point across: that in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the image of God does not stand or present itself as an independent entity over against what is imaged. Rather, we have here a 'unique, hypostatic union between archetype and image':

In the form of revelation, what is imaged is of no interest in isolation and for itself (the man Jesus), but only in so far as in this image (Christ!) God portrays himself - indeed, in so far as this man himself is God. Qualitatively intensified, here again the statement applies to the effect that 'God's invisibleness has become visible for the rational spirit' (Rom 1:20).⁵⁶

Thus, we have here an argument for the objective evidence of God's revelation in the world. This evidence is found in the form of the world, that is, in creation, and supremely in the form of Christ in whom the whole 'pleroma of the Godhead dwells corporeally'.

b. Jesus Christ as the Gestalt Gottes

Donald MacKinnon is surely right when he observed that Balthasar's treatment of the person of Christ is almost as wide as his entire *oeuvre*.⁵⁷ Balthasar's theology, like that of Karl Barth, is Christocentric. It is the result of a faithful and obedient contemplation of Christ as the *Gestalt der Gestalten* and as the *Gestalt Gottes*. Christ is 'God's own appearance', 'in whom the whole fullness of the divinity is bodily present' (Col 1:19). In the Incarnation the 'whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being' is perfected. In a majestic passage in his *Aesthetics* Balthasar gives the

⁵⁶ *GL* I:432.

⁵⁷ 'Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar's Christology with Special Reference to Theodramatik II/2, III and IV', in *The Analogy of Beauty*, 164.

magnificence and significance of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ its most profound and eloquent expression:

The incarnation uses created Being at a new depth as a language and means of expression for the divine Being and essence. Although ever since Luther we have become accustomed to call the Bible 'God's Word', it is not Sacred Scripture which is God's original language and self-expression, but rather Jesus Christ. As One and Unique, and yet as one who is to be understood only in the context of man's entire history and in the context of the whole created cosmos, Jesus is the Word, the Image, the Expression and the Exegesis of God. Jesus bears witness to God as man, by using the whole expressional apparatus of human existence from birth to death, including all the stages of life, all the states in life, the solitary and social situations. He is what he expresses - namely God - but he is not whom he expresses - namely, the Father. This incomparable paradox stands as the fountainhead of the Christian aesthetic, and therefore all aesthetic!⁵⁸

The fundamental assertion that stands out unmistakably in this explosive passage is that the Incarnation is the supreme form of God's self-disclosure - it is the one unique self-expression of God. The Incarnation thus isolates 'Christianity from all other philosophies and confessions'.⁵⁹ The form of the Incarnation is 'God's

⁵⁸ GL 1:29.

⁵⁹ This exclusivism which flows from Balthasar's theology of the Incarnation is expressed clearly and unmistakably in his book entitled *Elucidations* in which he writes: '... the point is not simply that God who has all names and yet is without name, who is wholly other and (beyond this indeed) not other, because without opposites, that such a God at particular points and in particular people in the world and its history becomes 'transparent'. That is indeed an all too fashionable word today and with its help, it may appear possible to reduce to a common denominator with the basic Christian message Indian avatars and prophetic or mystical personalities - for example Judaism or Islam, or even in other religions. Rather, what sets Christianity apart from all other religions is the offensive claim that the one who bears all names and yet is without name, who as the scripture says 'is everything' (Ecclus 43:27), has once and for all declared himself identical with a tiny something or someone who then can make countless millions of swarming humanity - identical with someone who then can make monstrously exclusive statements about himself as 'I am the door ... all who have come before me are thieves and robbers' (John 10:7f) and 'No one knows the Father but the Son and him to whom the Son will reveal it' (Matt 11:17). Cf. *Elucidations*, (London: SPCK, 1975), 35.

greatest work of art', a work which gives expression to 'God's absolute divinity and sovereignty and of the perfect creature', the eternal two-and-one, 'the Father and Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit'.⁶⁰ It is not difficult to see why Balthasar is sometimes called a 'Christologian'.⁶¹ Hence, for Balthasar the Incarnation is the objective evidence of God's revelation. But what does this mean, and what are its implications?

By 'objective evidence' Balthasar is referring to that evidence 'that emerges and sheds its light from the phenomenon itself'.⁶² As such it is different from the sort of evidence 'that is recognised in the process of satisfying the subject's needs'. The illuminating factor lies in the Christ-form in two senses. Firstly, the form of Christ has its own 'interior rightness' and 'evidential power'. Balthasar likens this to the evidential power that we see in a work of art or a mathematical principle. The form of Christ is not attested to from the outside but from within. It is this attestation by the Father which establishes it as it is in the first place - 'as the manifestation of God, as the Word of God, as God's testimony about himself'.⁶³ Secondly, this 'rightness' possesses the power not only to illuminate but transform the perceiving subject. Jesus Christ is the form which in-forms and trans-forms the Christian. Balthasar speaks of the image unfolding into the one contemplating it, resulting in the transformation of the beholder. He speaks of the metamorphosis that Paul talks about

⁶⁰ *Word and Revelation*, 151.

⁶¹ Pedro Escobar defines a Christologian as a 'theologian whose entire knowledge of God is from, by, with and in Christ'. He traces Balthasar's 'conversion' to the influence of St Ignatius, applying Ignatian Christocentrism throughout his theology. See 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Christologian', *Communio*, Vol 3, 1975, 3:306.

⁶² *GL* I:464.

⁶³ *GL* I:605.

(2 Cor 3:18) in which the beholder is changed into the image he beholds: 'The metamorphosis of which Paul speaks (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21) is above all an assumption of form, the receiving of Christ's form in us (Gal 4:19), the character and the impress in us of the only valid image of God'.⁶⁴

This however does not mean that the form will enlighten anyone. Because what is at stake here is nothing short of the 'correspondence of the human existence as a whole to the form of Christ' and not just as intellectual or technical adaptation to certain thought patterns and concepts, certain pre-requisites are needed. The evidential power demands a theological act of seeing the form.

This explains the annoyance which Balthasar displays over what he calls the methodic schizophrenia of the 'historical Jesus' versus the 'Christ of Faith' approaches, and the blind prejudice of the historical-critical method. The first leads to a 'two-storey' theory where, on the first (and lower) level is the Jesus of history exhaustively analysed by the science of philology and psychology, while on the second (higher) level stands the word of Christ who is the object of both communal and individual faith. This methodology is totally inadmissible since it has as its object the ambivalences of the inquirer instead of Christ.⁶⁵ It exposes the fundamental lack of understanding on the part of the inquirer regarding the object that he is investigating, an object which cannot be classified in the categories of 'the history of religions, nor of psychology, nor of history'.⁶⁶ 'The "historical-critical" destruction of the form put forward by the Evangelists ... only makes sense as an exercise if one

⁶⁴ GL I:485.

⁶⁵ *Word and Revelation*, 67.

⁶⁶ GL VII:153.

supposes that faith ... as such can be subjective and cannot correspond to any objective evidence'.⁶⁷ Since Balthasar is of the opinion that the contrary is true, the pre-requisite for seeing and understanding the form is

to accept what is given as it offers itself. If certain excisions are practised on the Gospels from the outset, the integrity of the phenomenon is lost and it has already become incomprehensible. The Gospel presents Christ's form in such a way that 'flesh' and 'spirit', Incarnation to the point of suffering and death, and resurrected life are all interrelated down to the smallest details.⁶⁸

We must not conclude that Balthasar is therefore uninterested in history and in historical research. On the contrary, like Gerhard Ebeling and other disciples of Bultmann, Balthasar is deeply interested in the 'New Quest for the Historical Jesus'. Henri de Lubac is right to say that Balthasar accords the contribution of scientific knowledge its proper place.⁶⁹ One should try to know as much as possible about the 'historical Jesus' in an attempt to perceive the form of Christ as it exists in history. Balthasar therefore challenges Bultmann's scheme of demythologising the New Testament.⁷⁰ However Balthasar is always careful to emphasise that pure historical facts alone could not bring us to perceive the inner event.

A case in point is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The purely historical narration of the crucifixion is '*a priori* never capable of laying down the path that leads to the inner event that is hidden therein'. Hence the gospels, in their attempt to

⁶⁷ GL I:466.

⁶⁸ GL I:467.

⁶⁹ 'A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Communio*, 2, 1975, 3:232.

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Kay, 'Aesthetic and a posteriori evidence in Balthasar's Theological Methodology', in *Communio*, 2, 1975, 3:297.

describe this historical event do so by means of the 'concepts and images that lay out a wide horizon of Old Testament theology, and thereby open a path for the history that leads to the only sphere from which a light of understanding can break in'.⁷¹

The *interpretandum* is indispensable; if one detaches it from the narration, one 'robs oneself of every approach to understanding it'.⁷² The contemplative theologian has the task of helping the believer see how all the various images are actually aspects of a single form which is

unique, not graspable by worldly vision, evident only to the eyes of faith and yet, precisely as such, it is truly form, in spite of the vast infinity of the dimensions that are opened up. It is not a vision of the form of God himself, but the appearance of this form in the previously described identity (of hypostatic union), as an identity of the obedient one and of his obedience in both natures. And this is more than merely image and likeness; it is the concealed epiphany of the thing itself in the medium of the relationship between God and creature.⁷³

c. *The Uniqueness of Christ*

Our treatment of the uniqueness of Christ must first take the following three perspectives into consideration. (1) The Christ-form is inseparable from the Old Testament. Together they constitute 'one historical revelation in the diptych of type

⁷¹ GL VII:203.

⁷² GL VII:204.

⁷³ GL I:480. It is important to note that Balthasar does not consider the form of Christ as the 'sign' which points to the thing that it 'signifies'. 'Jesus the Man, in his visibleness, is not a sign pointing beyond himself to an invisible "Christ of faith" - whether this view is nuanced more in a Platonising Catholic sense or in a criticistic Protestant manner. The image and expression of God, according to the Biblical assertion, is the indivisible God-man: man, in so far as God radiates from him; God in so far as he appears in the man Jesus. What is seen, heard, and touched is the "Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:1), naturally not in the contradistinction from the man Jesus, but precisely in the total structure which is the core and the nodule of all Johanne writings'. Cf. GL I:437.

and anti-type, promise and fulfilment'.⁷⁴ As fulfilment the Christform is indeed related to the overall order, but, precisely as fulfilment, it is not subordinated to that order. Promise has its truth only in the fulfilment, and, because it is not itself the fulfilled truth but can only participate in the uniqueness of fulfilment, it is not univocal with it.

(2) As the recapitulation of everything in heaven and earth in himself, Christ is the 'image of all images in creation and history' and therefore fulfils 'the partial truth contained in the religious myths of all peoples', which are 'taken up' and 'transcended' in the form that fulfils it.⁷⁵ Hence, in a sense, Christ 'inherits' the gods of paganism, although this does not mean that one can make a cosmic religion out of Christianity.⁷⁶

(3) Because Jesus was a man in time, and therefore a man of his historical epoch, he is at least at a certain level, accessible to the 'historical system of categories and to the typological manner of approach', though this does not mean that his message itself can be relativised, since as the Only Begotten Son, he brings this unique message from God.⁷⁷ Furthermore, since the essential categories of the religion of Israel are also the categories of its religious environment, Israel's religion of promise 'brings to Christ the general religious heritage of all mankind', and Christ, by fulfilling in himself Israel's message of promise, 'makes historical contact, through

⁷⁴ *GL* I:496.

⁷⁵ *GL* I:496-7.

⁷⁶ *GL* I:501-2.

⁷⁷ *GL* I:498.

Israel, with mankind's religious forms' thereby fulfilling the longings of all peoples.⁷⁸ These three perspectives demand a 'uniqueness within a general historical determinateness, and see this paradox as mediated by salvation-history that moves from the universal to the theologically particular and unique'.⁷⁹

The singularity and the uniqueness of Christ is then developed in four ways. Firstly, Christ is essentially different from the other founders of religion. The latter are but wise men who merely point to the 'way' which they have found to have been revealed to them, but Jesus from the outset points to himself as the way. The founders of religions point to the simple doctrine of dying to the world and rising again to God (or to the myth of the dying and rising God) but never identify themselves with the myth. Jesus on the other hand draws 'the form of his teaching and the form of his life together into strict identity, not only to the point of his death ... but even of the Resurrection itself'. In Jesus the mythical figure is identified with the historical figure: 'the uniqueness with which the form of Christ confronts us is the identity between myth and historical reality'.⁸⁰

Secondly, the founders of the great religions speak of the moment of their conversion, enlightenment or rapture, which is often the pilgrimage of toil and reward. This is so even for the prophets of the Old Testament. Only in Christ do we have a presentation of an identification of a founder's teaching and his entire existence which is impossible if a conversion experience was involved.⁸¹ Furthermore, all

⁷⁸ *GL* I:498.

⁷⁹ *GL* I:498.

⁸⁰ *GL* I:502-3.

⁸¹ Balthasar does not regard the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist as his 'conversion' experience. To do this, he says, is to enter into the realm of Gnostic Christology and to interpret John's portrayal as the 'mythical Gnostic schema

other 'saviour religions ... preach life out of death; the gospel of the cross proclaims salvation in death'.⁸²

Thirdly, the 'myths' of the 'bringers of salvation' are naturalistic and can at best be 'protological' and 'eschatological' whereas the deed of Christ is meant to be understood historically. This, as we have already seen, is on the one hand the fulfilment of Israel's religion and on the other hand the incorporation and embracing of the 'myths of cosmic transformation found in other peoples'. Also, what is negated by Christ is not the 'Being of the world, but its decadent mode of existence in alienation from God'.⁸³

Fourthly, and turning now to the image of God, Balthasar explains that the other founders are always caught up in the dialectic between God and the world. The possible solutions to this problematic are a) to steer midway between the One and the Many (the way of Mohammed); b) to abolish the Many for the sake of the One (non-Christian mysticism); and c) to incorporate the One into the many (polytheism and pantheism). Only God's trinitarian nature, that is revealed in the form of Christ, and which is otherwise ungraspable, is able to enlighten the relationship between God and man. The world can now be seen as the other or the many without its having to appear as a necessity for God's unity, and the otherness of creation is justified by the otherness that exists within God himself.⁸⁴ These four approaches properly demonstrate the uniqueness of the form of Christ.

superimposed on the historical Jesus'. *GL* I:504.

⁸² *GL* I:504.

⁸³ *GL* I:504-5.

⁸⁴ *GL* I:506.

There is one other matter relating to the uniqueness of Christ's form that is of import and should be treated at this juncture, namely the measure of the form of Christ. If Christ is indeed the 'Unique One', then 'no universal and external measures suffice to measure him; essentially he can only be measured by himself'.⁸⁵ Thus in order to demonstrate the harmony within, he causes an aspect of himself to be measured by another. The concept which Balthasar employs here is taken from the vocabulary of music, and, when used christologically it refers to the concordance between Christ's mission and his existence. When these two aspects are examined, no disharmony can be found. 'The mandated task is divine, its execution human, and the proportion of perfect 'attunement' prevailing between them is both human and divine'.⁸⁶ The conclusion to this seems to parallel Balthasar's reflection of the *analogia entis*, the relationship between God and the world:

If Christ is to be the Unique One, then, when we look at his form, what must happen is that all other forms, in spite of their qualitative difference and even opposition, come more and more to exhibit related characteristics, while he, who had seemed to be related to them and capable of being classified under the general categories, now appears in greater isolation, incapable of being reduced to anything whatsoever.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *GL* I:468.

⁸⁶ *GL* I:469.

⁸⁷ *GL* I:502.

d. *The Hiddenness of the Form*

Though the incarnation is God's supreme self-disclosure, 'along with the seen surface of manifestation there is perceived the non-manifested depth'. This paradox is the very thing that gives the phenomenon of the beautiful its 'enrapturing and overwhelming character'. Balthasar uses the work of art as an analogy to illustrate this point. In every work of art there is a dynamism - an interpenetration of the phenomenon of interiority (for example the phenomenon of intentionality) and the simple subjective disposition. Several approaches can be taken to 'discover' the artist's intention and disposition. One is to gather objective information about his intention. Another is to rely on the subjective appreciation of the work itself. Still another way is to do a sincere study of the artist's whole person, though the real value of this exercise is questionable since it may just be true that that particular work of art is not intended to be the expression of the artist himself, but a worldview which the artist wishes to propose and wants others to accept. In this case, it is the world view and not the artist himself that is projected in the work: 'the artist will conceal himself in his work as much as he will reveal himself'.⁸⁸

At this point one may argue that the analogy fails to apply to God. As creator, God can only represent himself in the things he creates. He is identical with his 'world-views'. This is of course true. The created order bears the image and likeness of the its creator and in this sense points to its author. But in God, Balthasar reminds us, the distance between creature and creator is infinite and cannot be bridged in any way. No grammar can be found that can adequately give it expression. It is this distance between God and the world that makes the analogy valid for the present

⁸⁸ *GL* I:442-3.

purpose.⁸⁹

Revelation in concealment reaches its perfection in Jesus Christ who is God incarnate. Jesus is the Word that goes beyond the sayable.⁹⁰ 'The incarnation of the Word means the most extreme manifestness within the deepest concealment'.⁹¹ It is manifestness because 'God explains to man by no means but himself' : 'man' (and not some kind of 'super-man') has in the incarnation become the language of God. It is concealment because the incarnation as 'the transition of God's absolutely unique, absolute and infinite being into the ever more dissimilar, almost arbitrary and hopelessly relativised reality of one individual man in the crowd from the outset appears to be an undertaking condemned to failure'.⁹² Louis Dupré sums up Balthasar's reflection on the revealedness and hiddenness of the incarnation as follows.

God is able to express himself in Jesus because he is expressive in his divine nature, and Christ's humanity, far from being a concession made to human frailty in God's revelation, is the divine reality itself as it becomes manifest. What remains concealed in him (his divinity) has not been withdrawn from manifestation, but rather manifests the inscrutable, divine mystery itself. As in the work of art, no ulterior reality hides behind the mystery itself. As in the work of art, no ulterior reality hides behind the form: the form totally manifests, adduces its own evidential power.⁹³

There is yet another aspect of this hiddenness that must be dealt with briefly:

⁸⁹ *GL* I:443.

⁹⁰ *Man in History* (London:Compton Printing Limited, 1972), 282.

⁹¹ *GL* I:457.

⁹² *GL* I:457.

⁹³ 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics', in *Communio* 16(1989), 404.

the question of hiddenness and guilt. Balthasar maintains that if one has failed to see the objective evidence of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, it is not because of the insufficiency of the evidence; rather it is due to the 'guilt of a "darkness" which does not see, recognise and receive the light'.⁹⁴ There is a sense in which the guilt of man 'forces' the Son to reveal himself in the mode of hiddenness. Guilt is not thereby excused by the hiddenness, rather the latter becomes the judgement for guilt. 'The hiddenness is the objective proof that the guilty have not wanted to see'.⁹⁵

3. The Mediation of the Form

Some preliminary statements about the form of Christ in its interconnectedness with the other forms and the context in which he came ought to be made before we can proceed with our study of the place and the mediatory functions of the forms of scripture and the church. Firstly, it must be said that since Christ's form in the world is to impress itself upon it and thereby to continue to shape it, what we are dealing with here is by no means a static form but also an event. There can be no separation between who Christ is and what he does. In fact Balthasar so emphasises the unity of the two that he maintains that 'we see what this form is from what it does'.⁹⁶ This emphasis is made early in his *Aesthetics* which is the starting point of his trilogy. There can therefore be no doubt that he considers revelation to be the Christ-event, and even though his first work employs the leitmotif of the visual arts to explain revelation, he does realise the fact that this category alone would be insufficient to

⁹⁴ GL 1:522.

⁹⁵ GL 1:522.

⁹⁶ GL 1:527.

explain the full dynamics of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. He therefore moves confidently from theo-phany to theo-praxis, from *Herrlichkeit* to *Theo-dramatik*.

Secondly, it is important to note that Balthasar's understanding of the place of the scriptures and the church with respect to their mediatorial functions is closely akin to the Alexandrian doctrine of the *corpus triforme*, i.e., God's incarnate Word has a 'body of scripture' (a scriptural form) and a 'body of the Church' (an ecclesial form).⁹⁷ Both scripture and the church share two commonalities: firstly, they are both perceptible expressions of the Christ-form, and, secondly, in both these mediums man shares in their communication and formation. Both scripture and the church are mediated through human beings: scripture is written by men and sinners, while the church is populated by men and sinners. The Enlightenment, Balthasar maintains, has made a positive impact on our understanding of scripture and the church in that it has helped us to see the institution of the church in connection with the institution of scripture. Let us consider each in turn.

a. *Scripture*

According to the older theology, scripture is seen as God's Word to the Church. In recent theology however, scripture is understood as the expression of faith's reflections on historical revelation. Balthasar maintains that both can be seen in unity. Divine revelation is received in 'the womb of human faith'. Therefore the partnership between the revealer and the recipient should not merely be a simple encounter of a speaking and listening person. Rather the perfection to that partnership is seen before or alongside us; it has truly been implanted into us (Jer 31:31f; Ez

⁹⁷ GL I:529.

36:26f).⁹⁸ There is therefore a continuity between the answering believer and the writers of scripture: 'the scriptural word that attests (*bezeugend*) is not external to the Word of God that is attested (*bezeugt*)'. The generative word makes constant use of the attesting word in order to make itself present in the believer.⁹⁹ Hence, the form of the historical Jesus cannot be discovered through the historical-critical method but requires ecclesial faith.¹⁰⁰ Only this, namely the church's faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ possesses the 'eyes of faith' to read accurately the legible form.¹⁰¹

Scripture remains the Word of God; it is not the word of the church. Using the imagery of a woman carrying a child in her womb, an imagery no doubt inspired by the deep Marian spirituality in which Balthasar is entrenched, he describes scripture as the Word by which the church, by her mediation in faith, carries the Word in her womb and gives birth to it in the world. This then is the relationship between the scriptures and the church, a relationship which pre-supposes the latter's relationship with Christ who brought her into being. 'The purity and clarity with which the Word of God presents itself in the world is in direct proportion to the transparency and purity of the medium of faith that receives it and from which it creates its own form'.¹⁰²

For Balthasar scripture is not revelation itself but a testimony of revelation; 'scripture is the word of God that bears witness to God's word'.¹⁰³ The force of this assertion is balanced by an attempt to approximate scripture as closely to revelation as possible.

⁹⁸ GL I:536-7.

⁹⁹ TD II:108.

¹⁰⁰ TD III:104.

¹⁰¹ GL I:538.

¹⁰² GL I:539.

¹⁰³ WR I: 9 ; GL I: 540

revelation as possible. The question that Balthasar asks himself is 'Is not the scripture Christ's authentic interpretation of himself by the Holy Spirit?' His answer: 'Scripture belongs to the Christ-form itself and is an expression of Christ's fullness and glory'.¹⁰⁴ The garment cannot be adequately separated from the form itself. Every attempt to grasp the 'body' behind the form of the image is therefore futile. In other words, scripture belongs unconditionally to the thing it attests to; it has no independent form by itself 'but properly belongs to the sphere of revelation', yet, that which it attests to always transcends the testimony itself.¹⁰⁵

Following Origen, Balthasar envisages the ontologically different characters of the Old and New Testament scripture. The Old Testament scriptures are to him always journeying towards the Incarnation of the Word, and despite of their proleptic intent there is something 'abstract' about them. The Old Testament scripture therefore is a 'pre-scripture', and this is so in the following senses: 'it is a written preliminary to what will be the concrete existence of the Word; it is a regulation or decree, anterior to the possibility of its fulfilment'.¹⁰⁶ Thus the Old testament scripture can, in a sense, only contain small particles of the full reality. Only in the Incarnation of the Word are we able to 'comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth' of 'the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge' (Eph 3:18ff). The New Testament is governed by Christology, and precisely because of this, Origen was moved to designate scripture 'as one mode of the enfleshing of the logos'. Once the ancient scripture is seen to be a part of the Incarnation in this way, the Old and New Testaments form a continuum: 'The coming-to-be of the Incarnation is rooted in the

¹⁰⁴ *GL* I:541.

¹⁰⁵ *GL* I:546-7.

¹⁰⁶ *TD* II:111.

faith of Abraham, who looked forward to the day of Christ (Jn 8:56), in the faith of Moses, who "considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb 11:26), and in the faith of the prophets who were inspired by the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet 1:11)'.¹⁰⁷ Thus all scripture has the Christological form.

From all that has been said so far, it is clear that the so-called 'spiritual' sense in scripture is not some secondary meaning behind the 'historical'. Instead, the 'spiritual' sense is central and is always contained in the 'historical'. 'This "spiritual" christological and pneumatic meaning can inwardly unfold itself as the Good News of God-given grace'.¹⁰⁸ The only 'really Christian interpretation of scripture is a pneumatic one, that is, one reads the (ancient) Scripture (*graphie*) with a view to the Incarnation of the entire divine Word and all subsequent scripture in the light of that Incarnation; furthermore it will seek to interpret what it reads by the Pneuma of Christ'.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, Balthasar is somewhat unenthusiastic, and perhaps even negative towards critical New Testament studies that tear asunder the obvious canonical unity with its sub-structures, redactional frameworks, 'traditions', and pericopai. The New Testament is united because the men who wrote it were all enraptured by the same glory of the Lord in the face of Christ. New Testament science for Balthasar, is therefore not science at all compared to the exegesis that preceded it, because it failed to be a method that is adequate to the object. 'Only contemplative reading of the New Testament is adequate to the glory of God in Jesus

¹⁰⁷ *TD* II:112.

¹⁰⁸ *TD* II:113.

¹⁰⁹ *TD* II:114.

Christ'.¹¹⁰ Brian McNeil is right when he wrote that Balthasar envisages the exegete as an 'iconographer' whereby the exegesis is integrated with the entire theological enterprise. Balthasar acts as a stringent reminder that the exegete is not allowed or justified to dismiss dogmatic questions as irrelevant to his own researches.¹¹¹

b. The Church

We come now to Balthasar's exposition of the church as the medium of God's revelation in the world. From the outset, the Church must be seen as the 'outworking' of the Risen Christ.¹¹² Thus, though the church may present itself or be regarded as the object of inquiry to the historian or the sociologist or to many other specialists, the church, when considered from the viewpoint of the Gospel, cannot be anything other than a medium whose function it is to point to the supreme form of God's revelation in the world, even Jesus Christ.¹¹³

The church is 'not created from the union of subjective genius with object world-spirit;. Rather she receives her being purely from the Lord himself. Balthasar uses, in accordance with the theology of the Patristics, various imageries to speak of this. The Johannine imagery of the blood and water which flowed from the wound of Jesus, symbolising, as it were, the two sacraments of baptism and eucharist which are the life-principle of the church is a case in point. Also considered is the Pauline use

¹¹⁰ Aidan Nichols, 'Balthasar and his Christology', *New Blackfriars*, 66 (1985), 321.

¹¹¹ Brian McNeil, 'The Exegete as Iconographer: Balthasar and the Gospels', *Analogy of Beauty*, 146.

¹¹² *GL* I:531.

¹¹³ *GL* I:557.

of the imagery of Eve's origin from Adam's rib. On this view Balthasar argues that if what is obtained from Adam's rib, that is, his corporeal and animated substance retains his image, how much more should the church retain the image of Christ since she 'proceeds from Christ's innermost personal reality' which makes her at once 'Body' and 'Bride'.¹¹⁴

With Christ as her sanctifier, the Church is to be seen as his spotless Bride¹¹⁵ who obeys God by obeying him.¹¹⁶ The church loves Christ, and through him learns what it means to be obedient to the will of the Father.¹¹⁷ Therefore, in its mediatorial role, the church must realise that she cannot claim for herself an autonomous form. The Church must realise that whatever she possesses comes from Christ, 'whose "fullness" she is because he has poured his own fullness into her, so that the Church is nothing other than Christ's own fullness (Eph 1:23)'.¹¹⁸ This however may not be immediately obvious because the church itself as the work of Christ, has its own objective and autonomous form. The analogy of human creation shows that if work is truly successful, it should possess an objective, autonomous form quite independent, even in meaning, from its creator.¹¹⁹ The Church will be a successful medium only when she is transparent to God on the one hand, and transparent to the world for God on the other. Therefore, in the Church,

¹¹⁴ *GL* I:557-8.

¹¹⁵ *GL* VII:93.

¹¹⁶ *GL* VII:95.

¹¹⁷ *GL* VII:97.

¹¹⁸ *GL* I:558.

¹¹⁹ *GL* I:557.

as with Christ himself, all historical positivity can and must lose its fortuitous character for the world (just as a work of art justifies itself in spite of its fortuitous uniqueness by appealing to its aesthetic necessity) by virtue of the fact that this positivity is made credible as the plausible expression of the God who reveals himself in Christ and, in turn, of man who reveals himself by responding to God through the church and through Christ.¹²⁰

The pneumatological element must not be neglected or marginalised as is the common tendency in many modern approaches to religious epistemology.¹²¹ The scripture and the church, in their power to express Christ, together constitute the work of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture not only gives a kind of 'ideal portrait' of the historical Jesus; it reveals in a form apprehensible by the world the fact that he is the Word of God. Jesus needs this dimension, prepared by the Spirit, in order there to take root and develop his reality, which is both ideal and real. Nor is the Church merely an historical effect of Christ; she is his "fullness" and his bridal "body"; whatever there is in her of Christian reality, he is as he expresses himself to mankind and impresses himself upon mankind through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹²²

¹²⁰ *GL* I:560.

¹²¹ The exclusion of the pneumatological element has resulted in disastrous consequences to theological epistemology. 'The Holy Spirit is a reality which is ignored by the philologists and the philosophers of comparative religion, or which is at least "provisionally bracketed" by them. The horizon of scientists cannot admit the question as to why the wind of world-history blew precisely into this sail, or why it did not choose another formula, just as historically insignificant, but that objectively and historically perhaps was quite close to it ... it is an accident of history that the favourable constellations, the historical *kairos* exalted this particular form. But what is certain is that whoever excludes the dimension of the Holy Spirit (the real Spirit, not the imagined one) from the phenomenon will not be able to understand it as it understands itself: as the grain of mustard that has within itself the ability to grow taller than all other bushes in the garden. But if one makes this excision, from what perspective is it that one intends to understand the phenomenon better than it understands itself? From the perspective of the general philosophy of religion? Or from the perspective of a (modern?) self-understanding of our own which cannot admit the form stamped upon history because this form "no longer says anything" to that self understanding?' *GL* I:494-5.

¹²² *GL* I:602-3.

The Incarnation of the Word confronts man, awakening him to his own unfinished constructions of the glory of God and the world and presenting him with something totally unique and incomparable, which authenticates, purifies as well as destroys. This concrete revelation is mediated through the scripture and the church. But how might man perceive this light? This is the concern of our next chapter.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION AND EXPERIENCE II: PERCEIVING THE FORM

The central question of fundamental theology is that of perceiving the form, which is, as we have already seen, an aesthetic problem. The basic question that expresses this central concern is, 'How does God's revelation confront man in history? How is it perceived?' This epistemological concern is confused in modern times by the re-statement of the question. The re-formulation of the central question, an exercise which is heavily influenced by the modern rationalistic concept of science, pushes the central concern to the fringe causing it to be marginalised. The question is rephrased in the following manner: 'Here we encounter a man who claims to be God, and who, on the basis of the claim, demands that we should believe many truths he utters which cannot be verified by reason. What basis acceptable to reason can we give to his authoritative claims?' When the question is put in this fashion, the enquirer plunges into an insoluble dilemma and has already forfeited an answer. Balthasar describes the dilemma as follows: 'On the one hand, he can believe on the basis of insufficient rational certainty; but then he is not believing on the basis of divine authority, and his faith is not Christian faith. Or, on the other hand, he can achieve faith by renouncing all rational certainty and believing on the basis of mere probability; but then his faith is not really rational'.¹ The only way to avoid the danger of being enmeshed by this dilemma into which the rationalistic school of Catholic apologetics and Protestant theology have largely fallen, and one which has given birth to the artificial dialectic of 'knowing' and 'believing', is to restore the

¹ *GL* I:173.

dimension of aesthetic contemplation.² This is the basic direction which Balthasar's reflection on revelation and Christian experience takes.

1. The Nature of Christian Experience

Such a theological aesthetics is indeed possible because God, in his own initiative and freedom, has in the incarnation taken form and 'allowed himself to be seen, heard and touched'. Through the incarnation, the revelation of God is at once both sensory and objective.³ The imperceivable has become perceivable through his free grace, and the perception of God 'is realised when God comes to the world and, yes, becomes world'. Through the incarnation God has allowed us to participate in his Godhead which is always transcendent. Balthasar describes this participation as the *admirabile commercium et connubium*. In the last chapter, we discussed at length Balthasar's understanding of the objectivity of God's revelation and the central place he has given to the facticity of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. There is no need to dwell on this again; what is of moment here is Balthasar's main thesis that the Incarnation is the locus and starting point of all our reflection on the Christian experience. We sense a degree of irascibility here, a temperament that pervades the writings of Barth, when Balthasar wrote the following words: 'whoever strives to go beyond this, whoever deems that the Father is still not visible enough in the Son, has not given sufficient thought of the fact that the Father has revealed himself in the Son, the "radiance of his glory and expressive image (*Ausbild*) of his being", the "total heir" not only of his historical revelation, but his entire "universe" (Heb 1:3). Nor has

² GL I:174.

³ GL I:311.

he sufficiently pondered the fact that, after this Word, who is the Alpha and Omega, the Father has nothing further to communicate to the world, neither in the present aeon nor in the aeon to come'.⁴

Three points should be made here regarding man's perception of God's objective revelation through the Incarnation. Firstly, just as man experiences the world with his whole being (body and soul), so also he experiences God. Man always finds himself in the real; and the most real reality is the 'Thou', i.e., his fellowmen and God his creator. In the Incarnation, man is confronted by this 'Thou'. Secondly, in the Incarnation 'flesh speaks to flesh', in the sphere of the senses: '... the Word chose this unmistakable language in order to overtake and encounter from below the sinner who has lost his spirit'.⁵ And thirdly, through the Incarnation, man encounters God in his self-emptying or *exinanitio*. Indeed the Servant could be understood only as the Lord who came down for our sake. Thus it is the senses that perceive what God has to do to be visible, what He has to do to make Himself heard by sensual ears: the senses perceive the non-sensual sensually.⁶ Hence for Balthasar, the 'senses are the exteriorisations of the soul, and Christ is the exteriorisation of God'.⁷ The epistemic value accorded to the senses by Balthasar is echoed through the centuries of Christian Tradition: Irenaeus,⁸ qualifiably in Augustine,⁹ in Denys,¹⁰ and in

⁴ GL I:302.

⁵ GL I:406.

⁶ GL I:406.

⁷ GL I:407.

⁸ GL II:46-7.

⁹ GL II:95ff.

Bonaventure.¹¹

Like Denys, Balthasar maintains that the revelation of God must meet the whole man.¹² In the light of this, Balthasar argues that the criteria for God-relationship in the so-called 'theology of experience' is too emotionally based and therefore inadequate. 'Feeling' is thought of as an isolated act alongside the intellect and the will. This exclusivistic treatment of the former has prevented the holistic perspective of experience from emerging, resulting in too narrow a criterion for man's relationship with God, a criterion that is too exclusively based on the emotional states and not on man's total constitution and disposition. Furthermore, the verb 'to feel' and the noun 'feeling', even if used to denote the 'absolute feeling of dependency' do not fully bring out the creature's primary aprioristic structure which revelation brings out. Thus Balthasar prefers to us 'to apprehend' and 'apprehension' as these serve the purpose better and 'convey more exactly the notion of having been touched from outside and above'.¹³

2. Faith and Knowledge

The pre-requisite for seeing the form is faith in God. Here Balthasar uses the word 'faith' in its broadest possible definition, namely, 'that the person must make space for the divine omnipotence'.¹⁴ He later asserts that the decision of faith is not

¹⁰ *GL* II:179.

¹¹ *GL* II:198.

¹² *GL* II:179.

¹³ *GL* I:145-6.

¹⁴ *GL* I:512.

only necessary for seeing the form correctly, but also for the 'act whereby the event lets itself be seen correctly'.¹⁵ Theology is not a matter of excavating the historical *bruta facta* that lie behind the faith of the Church, but encountering the truth that discloses itself there. This viewpoint enables Balthasar to make that sharp distinction between the theology which 'presupposes faith and does its thinking within the nexus of the church', which is for him genuine theology, and one which 'rejects faith as methodically dubious and irresponsible', preferring to subsume the truth of revelation under an anthropological truth. Balthasar categorises the latter as 'false theology'.¹⁶

What then does Balthasar understand by 'faith'? Again the matter is considered from various angles. From the outset, it must be understood that faith for Balthasar cannot be disengaged from the context of man's entire life. Such dichotomy would only lead to a supernaturalistic rationalism resulting in the purely abstract interpretation of faith. This tendency, which springs from a reaction to the simplistic notions of faith found in Romanticism and Idealism, resulted in the untenable doctrine of the analysis of faith which artificially, 'by a process of abstract isolation, disengages the Christian act of faith from all elements of insight and understanding and then proceeds to analyse it in this purified form'.¹⁷

The act of faith opens the whole man to God, not just an isolated faculty.¹⁸ Surpassing the Catholic notion of the *analysis fidei*, Balthasar's approach argues for a 're-integration of faith into the personal encounter between believers and God

¹⁵ GL IV:115.

¹⁶ GL VII:115, fn. 2.

¹⁷ GL I:139.

¹⁸ GL I:243-4.

through which they are drawn deeper and deeper into his knowledge through his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ'.¹⁹ There is therefore a concrete relationship between the human senses and faith. Because God appears in the realm of worldly reality, the centre of the encounter must be in the profane senses which make possible the act of faith. Thus faith must be sensory in order to be human.²⁰ This means that faith, far from being isolated and abstracted from natural experience, is seen by Balthasar to fulfil as well as transform all our natural experiences. 'Along with the ontic order that orients man and the form of revelation to one another, the grace of the Holy Spirit creates a faculty that can apprehend this form, the faculty that can relish it and find its joy in it, that can understand it and sense its interior truth and rightness'.²¹

In accord with the Church Fathers and the Doctors of High Scholasticism, Balthasar understands faith as the *lumen fidei*, the light of God becoming 'luminous' in man. God's light as 'grace', 'life' and 'truth', shines not only in our hearts that we might know the Son, but also through the Son 'who makes the radiance of this light possible' by his atoning death.²² From this, faith can be also understood as the 'participation' in the free self-disclosure of God's interior life and light: 'The created spirit does not "deduce" this reality (in which God is included in whatever way) from indications and logical premises; as spirit, it is from the very start already set in the

¹⁹ John Riches, 'Balthasar and the Analysis of Faith', *The Analogy of Beauty*, (ed.) John Riches, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 50.

²⁰ *GL* I:365.

²¹ *GL* I:247.

²² *GL* I:156.

light of this reality, at the same time thinking within it and directing itself towards it'.²³ There is therefore a theological a priori in man, a *sensorium* as it were, 'conferred in revelation itself, which perceives what revelation means, not in the general but in the unique sense of God becoming manifest';²⁴ and this is the foundation for all instruction from outside, i.e., from the sphere of church or of history. This theological a priori, which is found not only in the Christian but in all men because all are called to the vision of God, is different from the concept of the religious a priori that is found in liberal theology and in the fields of psychology and philosophy of religion, which failed to understand the concept correctly. But, far from rejecting the concept altogether, Balthasar maintains that it must be 'shot through by the elements of grace' and understood from the perspective of grace as the 'ontological and epistemological elevation and illumination of this a priori by the light of the interior fullness of God's life as he reveals himself'.²⁵

We move on now to Balthasar's treatment of faith and knowledge. The two are intimately and inseparably intertwined. This is evident in the entire Biblical testimony: the concept of faith includes the concept of knowledge.²⁶ The theology

²³ *GL* I:157.

²⁴ *GL* I:163.

²⁵ *GL* I:167.

²⁶ The people of Israel understood that faith is associated in the most unproblematic manner with the concept of knowledge. God who wants to be recognised, must be known. Faith as man's response to God, a response which listens, yields, trusts and hopes, is founded on the knowledge of God's historical leading of his people by grace. The Psalms demand a faith which is portrayed as endurance and perseverance, and this is founded on an experiential knowledge of God's fidelity and justice. In the New Testament, faith and knowledge are similarly conjoined to one another. Paul speaks uninhibitedly about knowing the 'mysteries of faith'. There is a certainty of knowledge in faith, but this certainty is founded not on having grasped, but having been grasped. John asserts that 'We believe and know that you are the holy One of God!' (Jn 6:69). For him, 'faith can appear as being the

of the great Alexandrians also spoke of this *circumcessio*: while restoring Biblical gnosis, it perfected *pistis* 'to its place of honour'.²⁷ For Clement and Origen, the perfect Christian is the 'gnostic' who 'understands' his faith interiorly. This experience is not reserved only for the intellectually gifted but is an imperative that corresponds objectively to the act of faith. The 'pistic' and the 'gnostic' are distinguished from one another by the simple fact that the former is one who by 'bare faith' relates in an external manner to the content of faith as it is presented in the ecclesial kerygma and based on its sole authority. The latter enthusiastically tries to appropriate interiorly what he believes and thus sees the essential elements of the faith unfold before his vision (*θεωρία*).²⁸ Without outgrowing the proclamation of the church, the gnostic Christian finds himself drawn evermore closer to the Logos who reveals himself: 'What is here involved is, therefore, nothing other than the turning of faith to its own interior authenticity, as faith in a proposition ("belief that Christ") becomes faith in a person ("believing Christ")'.²⁹ In Clement Christ leads men to the Father by *pistis* and also by *ζητησις*, i.e., 'the efforts of thought, asceticism and love'.³⁰ Faith then, is the foundation upon which gnosis is built.

In John and Paul as well as in Origen and Clement, the gnosis of faith can be

initiation and the way of Christian knowledge ... Or, conversely, faith can proceed from knowledge, which makes just as much sense, since knowledge of Christ's divinity engenders an attitude of adoring acceptance of everything that proceeds from it ...' (GL I:134-5). The Biblical testimony therefore teaches the circumcession of *pistis* and *gnosis* (Cf. GL I:131ff.).

²⁷ GL I:136.

²⁸ GL I:137.

²⁹ GL I:137.

³⁰ GL I:138.

understood by the concept of $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$ which means 'steadfast, illumining contemplation - provided $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$ is taken along with its theological prerequisites: incorporation into Christ through faith and sacraments; participation in the Holy Spirit, who introduces us to the fullness of truth; the revelatory will of the heavenly Father, who through Word and Spirit already now, within the veil of faith, wants to grant us a share in his own triune truth'.³¹

3. Archetypal Experiences

The relationship between the experiences of the apostles and that of the Church and individual believers is discussed under the concept of archetypal experiences. Christ is our archetype who invites man into the highest archetypal experience which is his own.³² The Church and individual believers can share in this archetypal experience through participation and imitation. This is done through the ministry of the eye-witnesses, as they communicate their archetypal experience.³³ The testimony of the eye-witnesses are considered from two perspectives. Firstly it is considered in itself; and here Balthasar classifies the experience into six categories which are to be considered at different levels: that of the Old Testament prophets, the experience of Christ Himself, the experience of the apostles, the experience of the Church, that of Mary and, finally, the experience, akin to that of Paul which Balthasar maintains constitutes the mystical vocations of the church.³⁴ Secondly, they must be considered

³¹ *GL* I:139.

³² *GL* I:304.

³³ *GL* I:306.

³⁴ *GL* I:307.

‘from the viewpoint of the inclusion of ecclesial faith, that is, with consideration of the manner in which every Christian believer is represented in the situation of concrete and fully human encounter’.³⁵

As the archetype, Jesus’ experience of God furnishes and conditions all of the Church’s experiences.³⁶ This is because of who he is and the direction of his coming to the world (John 3:31-34). Hence only in the context of the christological movement, i.e. in the context of the Incarnation, can Jesus’ experience of God be understood.³⁷ In the unique hypostatic union of the human and divine in Christ, God becomes close to man through his seeing, hearing, living and suffering; in the same way man comes close to God. Thus in Jesus something is being affirmed about both God and man. The Son allows us to participate in his experience. Balthasar maintains that there is a ‘seeing’ common to both Jesus and his disciples, by way of imitation. Because Jesus’ archetypal vision of God is from the perspective of one who is seen (sent) by God, whoever sees him sees the Father; provided of course that he is seen in the way he must and intends to be seen, namely, as the Word of the Father. This ability to see him as he really is and that everything human in Christ is ‘a word, an image, a representation, and an expression of the Father’ is bestowed on man by grace. Here we can see how fundamentally important the eye-witness of the disciples is since ‘it involves a human seeing, hearing, and touching of a genuine humanity’. Nevertheless this experience remains secondary because even in the experience of the eye-witnesses, it is faith which illuminates, and this faith is possessed by the Christian

³⁵ *GL* I:307.

³⁶ *GL* I:322.

³⁷ *GL* I:323.

who does not see Christ with the senses but through the testimony of the apostles.³⁸ Thus as the Word of God, Jesus Christ bears witness to what he, and only he as Son, has seen and heard of the Father. 'Jesus' experience of God, therefore, refers even believing man, according to his own *prolepsis*, to the immanent ascent to the Father'; this is an experience which is not dynamic and open-ended.³⁹

The Apostles are officially chosen and called by the Lord to function as eye-witnesses. In their constant association with Jesus in his public life, his passion and death, the apostles knew their Master through their senses. But with the death of Jesus, 'the Apostles' senses, accustomed to his existence, now fall into the void; there is no longer anything there to see, to hear, to touch'.⁴⁰ It is only with the resurrection that this experience is resumed anew, and in the forty days of the apostles' association with their Risen Lord, they experienced him with wholly new senses. 'The eyewitness of the Apostles draws all its force from this last phase, to be sure; otherwise they could hardly bear witness to anything more than an extraordinary man who was prophetically gifted and who performed miracles'. But this force did not come solely from their witness of the Resurrection, but 'from the fact that the man who appeared to them was the same whom they had known previously from long associations and whom they had seen suffer and die'.⁴¹ The difficulty here among the Apostles was not sensory experience; they do have natural senses but not yet spiritual senses. In other words their difficulty was a faith adequate for this faith-

³⁸ GL I:327.

³⁹ GL I:331.

⁴⁰ GL I:344.

⁴¹ GL I:345.

object and the capability of perceiving it fully. This came only after the Resurrection and after the Spirit was breathed on them by the Resurrected Lord.⁴² Thus the faith of the apostles began externally and in the material and only later becomes interiorised. Balthasar contrasts this with the experience of Mary whose 'experience of faith began with her innermost being and gradually attained external form'.⁴³

But how is this experience translated to the Church and the Christian? 'In what manner is the archetypal Christian experience incorporated into the Church so that members who are not graced with it can nevertheless participate in it?'⁴⁴ Balthasar has no straight-forward answer to this question. To him, the total reality of the Church is multi-layered and complex. Therefore, in order for us to answer the above question, we must first understand this multi-faceted phenomenon and how it operates in the dimension of the church. These different levels represent the different types of Biblical and archetypal experiences portrayed in the scriptures.

The first level is that of the eyewitness of the Twelve which is represented by the Petrine Tradition. Here the writings show that their eyewitness to the Church revolves around two main points: the kerygma, and its realisation in the Christian life.⁴⁵ It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Peter proclaims what he has seen;

⁴² *GL* I:345.

⁴³ *GL* I:346. We however maintain that the Marian experience is similar to that of the Apostles. Her faith began exteriorly as well with the appearance of the angel who announces God's will for her life to which she obediently surrenders (Luke 1:26-38). This faith, which began externally was later interiorised as she contemplated the meaning of the events that surrounded the birth (Luke 1:16ff) and the life of Jesus Christ (Eg. Luke 2:51-52).

⁴⁴ *GL* I:351.

⁴⁵ *GL* I:352.

the Church participates in his vision by listening intently and by being obedient to the proclaimed truth. Through obedience the community becomes a 'flock' (1 Pet 5:3): 'For this reason, the archetype of Christ in Peter has a certain tendency to become a moral example or to be reduced to such (1 Pet 2:21) ...'⁴⁶ The sacrament of baptism is given a high place because through it the believer receives that which 'contains within itself Christ's death and redemptive descent into hell' and to realise this means a decisive severance from sin. The faith of the Church is portrayed to be slightly different from that of the Apostle: compared to the vision of the Apostle, the faith of the Church is non-visionary (1 Pet 1:8). But it is precisely because of this that 'inexpressible and glorious joy' is promised to the Church. Balthasar concludes: 'This is, strictly and exclusively, the perspective of the hierarchical tradition, which through kerygma and sacraments incorporates the Apostles' eyewitness into the Church, and which for the rest, locates the actuality of Christ as archetype in the moral realisation of the proclaimed creed'.⁴⁷

The Pauline Tradition offers a perspectival difference - while the Petrine tradition is conveyed to the Church horizontally, namely, through the level of history, the Pauline eyewitness proceeds vertically 'from heaven' (Acts 22:6; 26:13); his Gospel came to him through revelation from God and not through the mediation of any man.⁴⁸ The Church, for Paul, is portrayed in a vertical structure, i.e., the Head who appears (to him) from above articulating and ordering the Mystical Body (Eph 4:10f). The Mystical Body grows up towards him, the perfect Man (Eph 4:13). While

⁴⁶ *GL* I:353.

⁴⁷ *GL* I:352-4.

⁴⁸ *GL* I:354.

Peter exhorts his followers to be good shepherds and therefore good examples to the flock, Paul understood from the very outset that he is someone who is crucified with Christ and daily dies with him. In Paul we see 'a living anticipation of the eschatological promise'. 'He not only shows, he infuses his vision and his certainty of salvation into the Church; irresistibly he draws the community into his joy, his *parrhesia*, his zeal, his prayer, his catholic love'.⁴⁹ Balthasar maintains that in the Pauline tradition we are to see, in the Church, the 'great charisms of mission which suddenly visit and fructify the Church', as seen in the great conversions from Augustine to Newman, and the great visions that are poured into the Church.⁵⁰

The Johannine Tradition, which constitutes something like a synthesis between the Petrine and Pauline Traditions, is two-pronged depending on whether we speak of the Epistles or the Apocalypse. Here we have, merged into a single unified stream, the earthly and the prophetic-heavenly tradition. John's direct vision of the Christ is not like that of Peter which is purely historical; his is already contemplative in itself. There is therefore no need even for 'spiritual senses' because in John the opposition between corporeal and spiritual senses is unthinkable and superfluous since he understood that he has seen, touched and heard the Word of Life with his bodily senses.⁵¹ The Apocalypse presents John as the prophetic seer who addresses the Church not in the name of the Christ in whom Peter greets them, or in the name of the Christ whom Paul saw on the way to Damascus, but rather the Christ of the Apocalypse - 'the Ruler of the kings of the earth, who is preparing to come upon the

⁴⁹ GL I:355.

⁵⁰ GL I:354.

⁵¹ GL I:357-8.

clouds in union with his enthroned Father and the seven spirits who stand before his throne (Rev 1:4f).⁵² 'This is what, as apocalyptic prophet, he inserts into the experience of the Church'.⁵³

Balthasar's treatment of Marian spirituality generally parallels that of Catholic theology. In his earlier discussion of the Marian experience of God he asserts dogmatically that in Mary, 'Zion passes over into the Church; in her, the Word passes over into flesh; in her, the Head passes over into the body. She is the place of superabundant fruitfulness'.⁵⁴ He develops this by stating, again rather dogmatically, that Mary's simple experience of motherhood has become a function of the archetypal experience of faith.⁵⁵ His contemplation of the physical-psychological aspects of Mary's experience of motherhood led him to spiritualise every aspect of that experience.⁵⁶ It is therefore not difficult to see how Balthasar is able to exalt the archetypal experience of Mary to such a high status.

The threefold archetypal experience of Christ, which is inferred by the Apostles on the Church for its use, remains permanently sustained and undergirded by the Marian experience of Christ, which in its depth and simplicity is quite beyond the power of words. But the Marian experience existed prior to the apostolic experience, and it thus wholly conditions it, for Mary, as Mother of the Head, is also Mother of the Body.⁵⁷

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the immaculacy of Mary leads Balthasar to the

⁵² *GL* I:358.

⁵³ *GL* I:362.

⁵⁴ *GL* I:338.

⁵⁵ *GL* I:339.

⁵⁶ *GL* I:340-1.

⁵⁷ *GL* I:362; 343.

following statement about Mary's archetypal experience.

Because of her immaculate nature, she always feels and senses that which is unsurpassedly truthful, which in the transition from faith into vision needs no corrective and which, consequently, even in its earthly concealment and constriction already possesses its definitive form.⁵⁸

Roman Catholic Mariology is not our primary concern here. What is of moment is to see how Balthasar applies this concept of archetypal experience to the Church and to the experience of faith in individual believers, i.e. how successfully he has answered his own question which was raised earlier. The section on archetypal experience, after a lengthy discussion, has a rather disappointing ending. The general statement that the four archetypal experiences converge in the church, and that they do not merely hover as unattainable ideas, 'but rather each in its own way and by means of a real continuity and communication of what is peculiar to it, these archetypal experiences are the very foundation of the life-form of believing man' do not answer *how* this all came about in a very adequate way. Even when this matter is taken up again, its articulation does not get any clearer.⁵⁹ The work which sheds the greatest light on this comes more than ten years later in which Balthasar wrote

In the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, the relationship between God and mankind is described chiefly under the headings of revelation and faith. And it is true that revelation is transmitted through individuals, of whom one can say that as prophets or visionaries they possess a different, more experiential knowledge of God than those who 'believe because they hear' (Rom 10:17). It is likewise true that the disciples' eyes and ears are called blessed, because they see and hear what so many others before them have longed to see and hear (Mt 13:16f). But this beatitude actually receives its force only after Easter, when the Lord disappears from the disciples: during their 'contemporaneity' with him they did not yet really see and hear at all. And it is precisely in this 'seeing and hearing', which becomes actual

⁵⁸ *GL* I:362.

⁵⁹ *GL* I:420-1.

only in the moment of the Lord's withdrawal ('It is good for you that I go'), that the Apostles' experience becomes archetypal for succeeding generations. On the one hand, the generations to come are deprived of 'seeing and hearing': 'Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe' (Jn 20:29; cf. 1 Pet 1:8); on the other hand, they are drawn by faith into the archetypal experience of the eye-witnesses on the same footing with them: 'What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, and touched with our hands ... of the Word of life (not 'the historical Jesus') - this is what we bear witness to and proclaim to you ... so that you too may have union with us' (1 Jn 1:1-3).

Evidently, according to John's letter, this sharing in the 'experience' of the original revelation of Christ, which should explicitly bring about 'union', is attainable only if hearers are drawn into a community of faith which implies a realisation of Christ in the Holy Spirit ...⁶⁰

This long quotation is necessary because it is here that Balthasar gives a clearer and more adequate answer to the question he posed in 1962. The experience of the Apostles 'becomes' Archetypal after their Easter experience of the Risen Lord. Succeeding generations of Christians are drawn into this experience by faith and by the work of the Holy Spirit. But does not this understanding of the experience of Biblical man place too much emphasis on the exceptional nature of their experience neglecting the fact that the percipient man in the Bible is in fact an ordinary man? Barth tries to show this by emphasising the commonly shared human element in the perception of Biblical man. The Biblical eye-witness is therefore to him exemplary but not archetypal.⁶¹

4. Spiritual Senses

The concept of the 'spiritual senses' is another key to understanding

⁶⁰ *New Elucidations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 42-3.

⁶¹ CD III/2:402-3.

Balthasar's theological epistemology in its subjective aspect. He himself states this fact when he begins his discussion of the subject.⁶² Balthasar understands perception as a fully human act of encounter. This necessarily does not only include the senses but emphasises them: it is only through the senses that man perceives the reality of the world and Being.⁶³ But with man's encounter with God who is Spirit one should not only speak of sensibility but 'spiritual' sensibility. The Christian who has 'risen with Christ and ascended to the Father', becomes a 'spiritual man' who not only possesses a 'spiritual intellect and will, but also a spiritual heart, a spiritual imagination and spiritual senses'.⁶⁴ Balthasar investigates the history of Christian spiritual theology to bring his understanding of the 'spiritual senses' into sharper focus.

It was Origen who first expounded the doctrine of the 'five spiritual senses'. Taking a few scriptural texts as his basis, Origen developed the doctrine that there exists in man a 'general sense of the divine', which he then subdivides into several kinds. He maintains further that there are two kinds of senses in us - one mortal, corruptible and human; the other immortal, spiritual and divine. This has led to two conflicting interpretations of Origen, one rationalistic and the other mystical.⁶⁵ Balthasar argues that neither would do, because a dualistic interpretation of Origen is impossible. Rather one must understand him to refer to the same senses 'which first are earthly and then become heavenly through the infusion of grace'.⁶⁶ He

⁶² *GL* I:365.

⁶³ *GL* I:365.

⁶⁴ *GL* I:366.

⁶⁵ *GL* I:371.

⁶⁶ *GL* I:371.

concludes, 'It is Christ's grace, therefore, in his dying and rising, that the "old man" is created anew and that the old fleshly senses become spiritual'.⁶⁷ The medieval phase saw the spiritual senses receiving a more mystical interpretation disappearing into the 'inaccessible heights of contemplative mysticism'.⁶⁸ Bonaventure understood the spiritual senses as the acts of the human intellect and will as they grasp God in contemplation, having been 'restored (*refecti*), facilitated (*expediti*) and brought to perfection (*perfecti*) by the triple infused *habitus* of the "virtues", the "gifts of the Spirit" and the "beatitudes"'.⁶⁹ Hence, we are not speaking about a second higher power or faculty alongside our corporeal senses, but the same sense having been perfected through regeneration. In the Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, Balthasar saw the modern exposition of the meaning of the spiritual senses. The *Exercises* have received two different interpretations. The first is to interpret Ignatius in the same light as Bonaventure, i.e., mystically. The second is to see the exercises as therapeutic and a preparation for prayer. Balthasar is of the opinion that both the mystical and the corporeal are included in Ignatius.⁷⁰

The relationship between the Spirit and the senses is then explored. The thoughts of four thinkers - a religious phenomenologist, a philosopher, a poet and a theologian - help to delineate the main concerns of this aspect of Christian anthropology. Speaking as a religious phenomenologist, Romano Guardini laments the fact that the capacity for spiritual knowledge has 'largely been lost' to man in the

⁶⁷ GL I:371.

⁶⁸ GL I:373.

⁶⁹ GL I:372.

⁷⁰ GL I: 378.

course of cultural history. Seeing has become merely an act of observation and verification which is then ordered and what is perceived is articulated by the intellect.⁷¹ Images have lost their significance, having been overshadowed in this age of technology by concepts and machines. This results in a 'dislocation into abstract conceptuality and sensualistic corporeality'⁷² which must be overcome if the living human reality is to re-emerge. Guardini then explains what he understands as perception. He stresses that the 'forms' that the eye sees are not only corporeal. The eye 'sees' the life of the plant, it 'sees' the vitality of the animal, in man it 'sees' the soul. Thus, for Guardini, 'seeing is an encounter with reality, and the eye is simply man himself as he can be confronted by reality in its forms which are related to the light. This definition is very similar to the Augustinian 'eye of the soul' and it is from this understanding of perception that the relationship between the Spirit and the senses is located: 'The bodily eye ... constitutes the material, so to speak, out of which the Holy Spirit means to create that eye which is to behold God "face to face"'.⁷³

The main purpose of the philosopher Gustav Sieweth was to show how words are rooted in images, hence arguing for the sensory basis of words. Abstractions, he maintains, are the product of modernity. For Sieweth, the arc of cognition goes from the senses to the memory to the imagination to the synthetic intellect (logos) and to reason. Each of these is the basis for the next. It is the senses, asserts Sieweth, that are open to the world. The eye does not see its own seeing but only the things themselves. Following Thomas Aquinas, Sieweth argues that the eyes are the most

⁷¹ *GL* I: 390.

⁷² Quoted in *GL* I:390.

⁷³ *GL* I:392.

spiritual of all the senses - it is the 'tree of the senses' while hearing is the 'centre or heart of sensory energy', and touch, taste and smell are the 'root of the senses'.⁷⁴ To see is to empty oneself into the light of the real, so that human vision is that which moves out into the open and into that which is the other.⁷⁵

With the poet Paul Claudel, the sensory perception of God is seen under two premises: the philosophical and the theological. In terms of the former, Claudel explains that the body is a work of the soul; it is the expression and the extension of the soul in matter.⁷⁶ Through the body, the soul experiences the world. Theologically he asserts that in the Incarnation, the God who became man began with the external senses and moves to the interior senses thereby awakening in the world dulled by sin a sensorium for himself. 'Claudel's approach presupposes that, through the correct use of the external senses, we can encounter God in everything in the world'.⁷⁷

Balthasar chose Karl Barth as the representative theologian to inform his theological anthropology. The Bible shows no abstract interest in the rational nature of man, rather its interest lies in man who meets and stands before God. This relationship of man before God attains its perfection in Jesus Christ, who is also 'God with us' and 'Man for Others'. By asserting emphatically that Christ reveals the essence and the humanity of man, Barth distances Biblical anthropology from all modern humanists since the Renaissance, including that of Goethe, the great idealists

⁷⁴ *GL* I:393-4.

⁷⁵ *GL* I:397.

⁷⁶ *GL* I:402.

⁷⁷ *GL* I:403.

and the humanism of Nietzsche.⁷⁸ Balthasar agrees with Barth in his critique of Patristic and scholastic anthropology that both have strayed away from this primary Biblical premise of human reality allowing themselves to be enticed by the abstract Greek concept of essence.

Monastic humanism and that of the modern times are also criticised for their failure to understand the full meaning of 'fellow-humanity'. Arguing that Gen 2.18f and the Song of Songs are concerned primarily with the spiritual-corporeal-being-together and being-for-one-another of man and woman, he shows that this mystery foreshadows the union between Yahweh and Israel, portrayed in the marriage-covenant and fulfilled in the relationship between Christ and the Church. 'This entire relationship is inseparably spiritual and corporeal, both as between persons and as between God and man, and this is developed in all directions on the basis of 1 Cor 6:12-20, 2 Cor 11:2f., 1 Cor 11:1-16 and Eph 5:22-33'.⁷⁹

Through the reality of the hypostatic union in Christ, which is for Barth the supereminent archetype of the analogous order between soul and body, man is a spiritual-corporeal reality. As a corporeal-psychic reality, Biblical man receives the Spirit not as a state but as an event. 'The (Biblical) spirit is the dialogical principle which is bestowed on man from the outset, coming from God and therefore leading back to God'.⁸⁰ The anti-Platonism of Barth's theological anthropology is seen very clearly in the following statement: 'If the body is not organic body but purely material

⁷⁸ *GL* I:381.

⁷⁹ *GL* I:383.

⁸⁰ *GL* I:385.

body then it is without soul when it is without body'.⁸¹ Another quote from Barth which Balthasar cited would help us to see the crux of the matter: 'Perception is an undivided act, in which awareness makes thinking possible and thinking awareness ... [It is] certainly not only my body, but also my soul which has awareness, and it is certainly not only my soul but also my body which thinks'. 'The situation', Barth continues, 'is rather that man as soul of his body is empowered for awareness, and as soul of his body for thought'.⁸²

The study of these four thinkers led to a deeper understanding of the spiritual senses. Here are Balthasar's own words as he draws the section to a close

The agreement that emerges from four thinkers of such different temperament is striking. In his own way, each of them conceives man as a sensory-spiritual totality and understands man's two distinctive functions from the standpoint of a common centre in which the living person stands in a relationship of contact and interchange with the real, living God. All four insist on justifying sensory knowledge pre-eminently by proceeding from the higher to the lower and from the interior to the exterior - regardless of the fact that in themselves, the senses constitute the 'exterior' and the 'inferior' and, as such, are the empirical basis for all spiritual thinking and willing and the vehicle which sets this in motion.⁸³

5. The Place of Theology

Before we conclude this chapter by offering our assessment of Balthasar's theology in general and his theological epistemology in particular, we need to examine yet another important issue - Balthasar's understanding of the place and function of

⁸¹ *CD* III/2, 378.

⁸² *GL* I:386.

⁸³ *GL* I:405.

Christian theology. In an article entitled 'The Place of Theology'⁸⁴ published in 1965, Balthasar argues that it is only by a serious reflection on the form of God's revelation that we can come to a correct understanding of the nature and task of theology and the approach it should take. Balthasar begins therefore with the Incarnation which he eloquently describes as '[T]he Word that is God became man, without ceasing to be God. The Word that is infinite became finite, without ceasing to be infinite'.⁸⁵ It is God's revelation in Jesus Christ that makes theology possible: 'And because he is Word, and as Word, took flesh, he took on, at the same time, a body consisting of syllables, scripture, ideas, images, verbal utterances and preaching, since otherwise men would not have understood ...'⁸⁶

The true preparation for the reception of this revelation is faith which is defined as the 'surrender of the finite person in his entirety to the infinite Person'.⁸⁷ There is hence an encounter of two existences - that of the finite person embodied in the flesh, and that of the believer. The surrender of the latter in faith implies two things. Firstly, an absolute will and readiness to encounter what is human (i.e., through the Incarnation) and the infinite content in finite concept; and, secondly, 'the surrender in question means the will to make this infinite meaning (to which no knowledge in time can attain) the ground of one's existence', which Balthasar, in the same sentence, defines as the willingness 'not only to live in the presence of the

⁸⁴ *Word and Redemption*, II, 7-22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

Word, but to live by its power and in view of it'.⁸⁸

The external graces and 'signs' with which the Spirit has endowed the Church are not ends in themselves, but the means to the above-mentioned ends. Because this applies to the whole official side of the Church, it also applies to theology.

Like all the modes in which the Church sets forth her teaching, theology can only be oriented toward these two poles, and so toward the purity and fullness of the Church's teaching, with which it partially coincides. For, while being a special form of the Church's teaching (the theologian, too, has an official role), theology is, at the same time, a function, a corrective, a preliminary to the official teaching. Together with this latter and the sacraments, theology is a means, an active agency for pouring the infinite riches of divine truth into the finite vessels in which revelation is given to us, so that the believer may be capable of encountering this infinity in adoration and active obedience.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding the subtle allusion to the theologian's allegiance to the magisterium, the main point to be gleaned from the above citation is that theology is to serve as an agent whose purpose is to purify the Church's teaching and to bring about true worship and active discipleship within the Church.

From the above reflections a few conclusions follow. Firstly, 'in theology all that has to do with the finite aspect to the Word (with concepts, images, the letter) must be considered solely as a means of reaching the infinite therein'.⁹⁰ In order for theology to do this it must first investigate the 'formal logic of the mode of speech and thought of the Word of God'. Though such an investigation resembles the approach of Bultmann it must differ from him in that it does not approach the Word of God through any philosopher or existential presuppositions, but from the basic fact

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

of the Incarnation. Faith alone is the criterion for Balthasar. 'The theologian, therefore, is required to apply the laws of human thinking in such a way as to bring out clearly the law of faith'.⁹¹ Secondly, theology must be concerned with the whole truth that is presented in the Word of God. Theology must thus be 'universal' and 'catholic'. 'Theology is the expression of the verdict passed by the divine word over the human. This is, in fact, the form taken, from the beginning, by the entire word of scripture; and it is impossible for theology to evade this form'.⁹²

Can theology, then, be called a science? If it can, in what sense must this be understood? Balthasar is reluctant to say that theology is a science identical with the other sciences. Theology is indeed a science, but in a unique sense, and only analogously equivalent to the exact sciences. For the Fathers, theology was 'the somehow conclusive *gnosis* that brought to truth that which the Greeks and other nations designated "philosophy" (which always included a doctrine about divinity or the gods)'.⁹³ In the Middle Ages, theology was understood to be wisdom, *sapientia*, and therefore stood at a higher plane than the theoretical sciences. The transition to high scholasticism saw the rise of Aristotelianism and with it a certain concept of science. Thomas Aquinas argued that sciences are not autonomous; they always need to assume certain propositions or results from other sciences. The science of God is two-fold. One aspect comes from the evidence of the principles of reason, perceived by the senses and which seeks to reflect about the origin of things through the use of

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹³ *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 47.

reason (philosophy or 'natural theology'). The other is the way of revelation and faith where one, as it were, acknowledges interiorly the rightness of the truth and clings to it for its own sake.

Thomas therefore asserts an analogy (not an identity) between the structure of natural reason (what is given by the senses and is worked upon by the light of pure reason, which corresponds to the basic disposition for 'being as a whole') and the structure of theological reason (what is historically given) - the Bible, summarised in the Creed and kerygma, believed and worked upon with progressive understanding through the light of faith, which is a certain participation in God's self-contemplation and in the vision of God which the blessed have.⁹⁴

Theological work is scientific in the sense that reason is used to penetrate that which is put before it to be believed. Reason (no doubt supported always by grace) is required to analyse, to see connections and to work out the ramifications and implications. Balthasar concludes

Without the concept of analogy, the inquiry into the scientific structure of theology will fail. For theology cannot possibly be counted univocally among the other sciences (which argue from the highest principles evident to reason); belief in 'that which is presented for belief' (whether in statements or in historical events) remains its basis and prerequisite. On the other hand, it can only be called a science (analogously) when what is received in faith can be assimilated and understood in a genuine effort of reason.⁹⁵

The material of theology is then considered. Balthasar makes the following points. Firstly, the material of theology must be governed by revelation. This historical revelation is described in scripture: 'and this (i.e. the revelation) in the way in which it actually was given in history - or, more precisely, as it happened

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49; *GL* I:76.

⁹⁵ *Convergences*, 51.

historically within the human race and is described in scripture'.⁹⁶ Again Balthasar emphasises the importance of understanding scripture in its entirety: 'Scripture is not a quarry out of which theology can hew individual sentences to suit its purpose. It is the witness of the total event, a unity in itself; and it is as a totality that it is the object of theology'.⁹⁷ Secondly, theology must be contemporary. By this Balthasar means that theology must always be attentive to the light that the Holy Spirit sheds here and now on revealed truth. The theologian is described as a watchman who is able to read and interpret the signs and to discern the spirits. Thirdly, theology must always be in conversation with tradition. Only in so doing will it result in tradition today. This of course is the hallmark of Balthasar's own theology, a principle by which he tries very hard to abide.

Nothing brings so much harm in its train as the failure to appreciate an historical context. It is bound adversely to affect the theology of the present. It is an ostrich-like proceeding - with this difference, that the ostrich, in hiding its head in the sand, counts on not being seen at all, whereas the theologian, hiding in the sands of timelessness, hopes despite his disregard of history, to be taken account of by history.⁹⁸

Another issue that seriously troubled Balthasar is the modern tendency to divorce theology from spirituality. In another article, 'Theology and Sanctity', Balthasar makes this startling observation: 'In the whole history of Catholic theology there is hardly anything that is less noticed, yet more deserving of notice, than the fact that, since the great period of scholasticism, there have been few theologians who

⁹⁶ *Word and Redemption*, II, 16.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

were saints'.⁹⁹ The theologian, according to Balthasar, is someone 'whose office and vocation is to expound revelation in its fullness and therefore whose work centres on dogmatic theology'.¹⁰⁰ The witness of the theologian, Balthasar maintains, involves both theory and practice, since it is impossible to dichotomise the two.

From the standpoint of revelation, there is simply no real truth which does not have to be incarnated in an act or in some action, so that the incarnation of Christ is the criterion of all real truth (1 Jn 2:22; 4:2) and 'walking in the truth' is the way the believer possesses the truth (2 Jn 1-4; 3 Jn 3-4).¹⁰¹

This unity of theology and spirituality is found in all the Fathers of the Church. In the middle ages, it was given its most brilliant elaboration by the mysterious Denys the Aeropagite in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. 'But as theology increasingly took on a "scholastic" form, and Aristotelianism burst like an elemental force, the naive unity hitherto accepted was gravely shaken'.¹⁰² The result of this is that philosophy somehow began to emerge and was regarded as a special discipline alongside theology 'with its own concept of philosophical truth, which was perfectly correct in its own sphere ...'.¹⁰³ The Aristotelianism of the thirteenth century gave birth to 'modern "secularism" and thereby introduced new tensions and set new problems to the Christian'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Writing some twenty years later, Balthasar could say that every member of the Church of Christ is a saint and witness. Cf. 'Theology and Holiness', *Communio* 14, 4, 1987, 344; 'Theology and aesthetic', *Communio* 8, 1, 1981, 345.

¹⁰¹ *Word and Redemption*, II, 50.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

Teachers behaved as though man knew from the outset, before he had been given revelation, knew with some sort of finality what truth, goodness, being, light, love and faith were. It was as though divine revelation on these realities had to communicate itself to these fixed philosophical conceptual containers that admitted of no expansion.¹⁰⁵

The harmful separation between theology and spirituality ensued. 'Theology and spirituality have become, as it were, each a world of its own, with hardly any point of contact, and so saints and spiritual writers are more and more ignored by theologians'.¹⁰⁶ The end result of this is the disappearance of what Balthasar calls the 'complete' theologian, i.e., the theologian who is also a saint.

Balthasar is convinced that the solution to this problem cannot be found until a serious re-assessment of the nature of theology is made. We have already discussed what Balthasar understood the nature of theology to be. To that discussion we would like to add the analogy of the bridegroom and the bride which Balthasar himself uses to describe theology: theology must always be seen as a conversation between the bridegroom and the bride in which 'the bridegroom gives, (and) the bride receives ...'¹⁰⁷ In this respect Balthasar is in agreement with Bultmann's understanding of revelation as personal encounter. Theology for Balthasar must be contemplative theology. He objects to the modern tendency to abstract ^{the act of contemplation} from theology, and methodically bracketing as Husserl does, ^{which} only that ^{which} is factual. His approach rather is similar to the theology of the Fathers, a contemplative theology where the whole of God's revelation is contemplated.

In the light of the above analogy, Balthasar maintains, as does Barth, that

¹⁰⁵ *Word and Redemption*, II, 56.

¹⁰⁶ *Word and Redemption*, II, 63.

¹⁰⁷ *Word and Redemption*, II, 76.

Christian theology can only be done within the church. For him the Christ event exists only in correlation with the Church event, and it is only in this situation of 'reciprocity that the individual can appropriately situate himself in his believing and in his theologising'. 'Outside the circulation of love between the bridegroom and the bride, between head and body', he adds, 'no one will ever know what theology signifies, and still less, what is the momentum of the glory of divine love'.¹⁰⁸ In the same sense, exegesis, which for Balthasar is a very valuable theological science, must (in fact can only) be carried out in and with a view of the Church.

Hence the fundamental principle that exegesis - which is indeed a very valuable theological science - can be practised meaningfully only within the comprehensive view of the Church. If one stands outside, one will - unavoidably - begin to break up the indivisible unity of the figure of Christ by changing words to more fashionable ones which most likely do not mean the same, or to words that can be found also in other religions so that while one hears similar expressions, these are merely generically religious and not uniquely individual to Christianity. Such manipulations are just as destructive as if, for example, someone would omit every fifth or tenth beat from a phrase of a Mozart symphony.¹⁰⁹

The dialogical nature of theology (i.e., between bridegroom and bride) presupposes a place for prayer. Like Barth, Balthasar was much influenced by Anselm. 'Knowledge must never be separated from the attitude of prayer with which it began. It can do no more than gnosis could outstrip faith, and indeed it is an inner form of faith: "faith that seeks understanding"'.¹¹⁰ Prayerful theology does not mean frivolity: theology must always be conducted with rigorous precision; it must 'correspond at all points with its object, itself unique among objects of knowledge;

¹⁰⁸ *GL* VII:110.

¹⁰⁹ 'Theology and aesthetic', *Communio* 8, 1, 1981, 65.

¹¹⁰ *Word and Redemption*, II, 83.

and conform to its special content and method'.¹¹¹ Only the renewal of this perspective can prevent the 'theology at the desk' from superseding the 'theology at prayer'. Balthasar learns this not only from Anselm, but also from the 'Marian prototype' which is upheld and emulated. Balthasar claims that Marian spirituality is able to dissolve the artificial dualism that may result from a 'theology at prayer'. He maintains

This is the proper origin of the theology of the Church. This wisdom of the Marian Church consists of making place in oneself from the beginning for the word of God with the *Fiat*, in meditating on it in the heart, in letting it grow, in bringing it to the world in the form of man, and in entrusting it to humanity. In this, Mary is also the prototype of the whole theology of the Church, and for this she is honoured by the Fathers with the title 'Theologus'. From this is derived the primary connotation of every theology of the Church: it can move only in the circuit of word and responding wisdom, of revelation and ecclesial obedience, a wide circle given the fact that it embraces every truth, because in the Logos of God is founded the *logos* of every purely human knowledge, of every worldly science ... From this it follows further that every ecclesial theology as a response to the infinitely free and gratuitous word of God must be adoration, thanksgiving, in brief, doxology. Given that it moves in the circuit of divine invitation and of human response, it cannot be separated even for a second from the character of the word as personal appeal; it cannot even for a second transform and reduce the infinite speaking subject to a neutral object, not even under the pretext of separating content of everything said from him who speaks, who is God ...

To cultivate this theology by following Mary cannot be the privilege of the 'saints' (whose theology is then rejected as a spirituality not to be taken seriously) but must be the fundamental act of every theologian whether layman or 'professional'.¹¹²

Antonio Sicari writes that according to Balthasar 'theology takes place beginning with the living insertion of the theologian within the Church ("conversion",

¹¹¹ *Word and Redemption*, II, 85.

¹¹² 'Dalla teologia di Dio all teologia della Chiesa', *Communio*, Italian edition, 58 (1981), 15-16. Quoted by Antonio Sicari in 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Theology and holiness', *Communio*, 16, 1, 1989, 362-3.

"new beginning of thought"); and this living insertion is both an assumption of objective ("communal") holiness and a gift/task of subjective holiness. It is from this sole point of view that theology can firmly maintain its identity and wholeness'.¹¹³

6. Concluding Reflections

We have now come to the end of our exposition of Balthasar's conception of revelation and theology. Through this exposition Balthasar's theological epistemology and with it his theological methodology becomes clear to us.

We recall at this juncture Louis Dupré's succinct assessment of Balthasar's theological vision, namely the integration of grace and nature, thought and feeling, culture and theology 'within a synthetic, comprehensive, theological reflection on form'.¹¹⁴ The central theme of Balthasar's enterprise can therefore be located in a simple idea which is inspired by the reality and mystery of the Incarnation. Dupré encapsulates Balthasar's basic impulse in the following description.

By assuming human nature God transformed the very meaning of culture. Henceforth all forms have to be measured by the supreme form of the Incarnation. Theology itself, indissolubly united to this visible form, thereby acquired an aesthetic quality. It would have to show in its very structure and diction 'the diversity of the invisible radiating in the visibleness of the Being of the world' (I:431).¹¹⁵

So what we see here is a cultural theologian at work; a theologian who seeks to 'harvest the fullness of his Germanic, literary, philosophical and theological,

¹¹³ Antonio Sicari, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Theology and holiness', *Communio* 16, 3, 1989, 365.

¹¹⁴ 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics', *Communio* Vol 16, 386.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 385.

exegetical and systematic knowledge into a theological synthesis'.¹¹⁶ His major works can therefore be described as collages of culture and Christianity. But the genius behind all this is the presentation of that integration in the form of a theological aesthetic.

Although Balthasar has written many seemingly disparate things, and this is certainly one of the reasons why he is not as well known as a theologian as Yves Congar, Lonergan or Rahner, his major theological works *Herrlichkeit*, *Theodramatik* and *Theologik* offer us a brilliant synthesis of the content and form of his theology. In an article entitled 'A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar', Henri de Lubac pays a tribute to Balthasar and outlines the salient features of his theology. Balthasar's theology is, firstly, essentially Trinitarian. Using the symbol of the 'seamless coat' Balthasar brings home the point that the Trinity does not in any way fragment the divine unity - 'it is revealed to us, after all, through its work of salvation which is itself perfectly one' (233). Balthasar's is a traditional theology. But the conservatism of the author does not in any way make his theology obscure or irrelevant as some who have failed to understand his purposes have alleged.

His spiritual diagnosis of our civilisation is the most penetrating to be found. Though it would be going too far to claim that he had produced a complete outline of the famous Scheme 13, he did, certainly, anticipate its spirit when he shows how 'in the same way that the Spirit calls the world to enter into the Church, so he calls the Church to give herself to the world'; and he warns us that no good will come of a facile synthesis of the two. In many cases one would also find in his writings the means to avoid the pitfalls of false interpretation which inevitably follow a call to *aggiornamento* (229).

The sources of Balthasar's theological thinking are not only sacred scripture, modern

¹¹⁶ Medard Kehl, 'Introduction: Hans Urs von Balthasar, A Portrait by Medard Kehl' in *The von Balthasar Reader* (ed) Medard Kehl and Werner Löser (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), 46.

philosophy, modern theological movements and the investigation of the human sciences, but also, and supremely, the great tradition of the church. 'The symbolic holistic understanding of the fathers of the church and not the critical-analytic reflections of the moderns is what forms the real horizon of his thought'.¹¹⁷ Thus though Balthasar's theology reflects a dialectic between tradition and modernity, it is ultimately the great traditions of the patristics and the Schoolmen that constitutes its life-blood. It is a theology which submits, sometimes uncritically, to the authority of the tradition, and one which, precisely on account of this submission, seeks to address the problems posed by modernity. O'Meara observed that 'Balthasar's originality lies in structure more than in content'.¹¹⁸

As long as he is unfolding for us approaches leading to Christ, propaedeutical questions drawn from religion, culture and metaphysics (Paul Tillich's questions, Justyn Martyr's *logos spermatikos*), the Swiss theologian's creativity seldom flags. The core of Christian revelation, however is rarely reached. We have not a new theology of grace in history but new arrangements of biblical and theological insights phrases and motifs.¹¹⁹

There is a sense in which the form and content of Balthasar's theology constitute an indivisible whole. That is to say, the structure of his theology cannot be so divorced and isolated from the content as the above observation seems to imply. The structure reveals his theological presuppositions and the selection of materials shapes his thoughts as well as giving them expression. This in turn determines the form of his theology, and consequently its structure, so that aesthetically and

¹¹⁷ M Kehl, 'Introduction', 5.

¹¹⁸ See Thomas O'Meara, 'Of Art and Theology: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Systems' *Theological Studies*, Vol 42, 1981, 272-6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

substantially, his theology is a dynamic symbiosis of form and content. But the general thrust of the remark must be taken seriously, for there are to be found in Balthasar's theology some fundamental anomalies. These shall be discussed later in this section.

Two more general remarks about his theology must be made at this juncture. The first concerns his affinity with Plato. There is much in his theology which associates him closely to the perceptions of the ancient philosopher. To begin with, it is clear that Balthasar's understanding of aesthetics as 'perception' is consonant with that of the original Greek sense. His transcendental aesthetics places him in close proximity to Plato's theory of Forms. So does his idea of Beauty, which bespeaks of Absolute Beauty which is permanent and eternal giving meaning to the lower forms of beauty, so that the latter points to the former while the former gives meaning and defines the latter. Balthasar's conception of the inextricable unity of Beauty and Goodness also finds its parallel in Plato's perception that the Absolute Beauty of the *Symposium* cannot be divorced or separated from the Absolute Good of the *Republic*. Balthasar's theology aims to show the circumincession of the three transcendentals. Plato's use of the analogy between Beauty and Light is also found in Balthasar. So is the philosopher's emphasis, in the *Phaedrus*, that Beauty is the most clearly seen of all the forms - hence his emphasis on sight.¹²⁰ Balthasar's theological project is to show the superiority of the eye as the theological organ. Furthermore Balthasar's indebtedness to the Great Tradition of Western Theology (Augustine, Anselm, Scotus, Bonaventure and Aquinas) and of the Dionysian mystical Tradition that flowers from St. John of the Cross does appear to portray him as a theologian who is formed by

¹²⁰ *Phaedrus*, 250d.

Christian Platonism. Though his exposition of Plato gives the impression that his own theology is inimical to the thoughts of the great philosopher, at least one of his interpreters felt that Balthasar's negativism towards Plato is strategic rather than substantive.¹²¹

There is however a fundamental difference between Plato and Balthasar. The latter does not wish, as the former does, to pierce behind the appearance of matter, and arrive at eternal ideas. Rather his whole aesthetics, and therefore the basic premise of his theological epistemology, is affirmation of the real and the concrete, and thus learning to see things as they are in themselves and in their entirety. Only by so doing can we perceive the reality of being in its pluriform concreteness. This is the crux of his theological aesthetics. 'The Light which shines forth from the form and reveals it to the understanding is accordingly inseparably light of the form itself (Scholasticism speaks, therefore of *splendor formae*) and light of being as a whole, in which the form is immersed, so that it may have a unitary form'.¹²²

It is this emphasis on sight and vision that makes Balthasar's analysis of the alleged neglect of aesthetics in Reformed theology questionable. Protestant theology's emphasis on the transcendence of God does not preclude the fact that God objectifies himself in the world and that the world as such manifests his glory through its participation with its Creator. Frank Burch Brown offers us an alternative assessment when he writes that

... all in all, Reformed piety affirms the power and activity of a

¹²¹ Noel O'Donoghue, 'A Theology of Beauty', *The Analogy of Beauty. The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (ed) John Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 7.

¹²² *GL* IV:31.

radically transcendent God. This is a God who graciously chooses to communicate through particular forms - even aesthetic. Although in principle reserving the right to grace and bless everything equally, the God of radical transcendence makes most use of what is plain and humble and pure, in sense, form and imagination.¹²³

Overemphasis on the leitmotif of the visual arts led him to overlook to aural and therefore intangible aesthetics of the Protestant tradition. Luther's famous statement: 'After theology I give music the highest place and highest honour' is a case in point.

We spoke earlier about the alleged anomaly in Balthasar's theological aesthetics. This has been argued eloquently by Noel O'Donoghue in his article entitled 'A Theology of Beauty' where he maintains that there is a disconcordance between the announced intentions of the Jesuit theologian and the actual form and content his theology takes.¹²⁴ The structure of Balthasar's theological aesthetics postulates a prominent role to the principle of the analogy of being. Balthasar argues that '[T]he fundamental principle of a theological aesthetics ... is the fact that, just as this revelation is absolute truth and goodness, so also is it absolute beauty; but this assertion would be meaningless if every transposition and application to revelation of human categories from the realms of logic, ethics ('pragmatics'), and aesthetics, if every analogical application of these categories, were simply forbidden'.¹²⁵ To be sure, Balthasar develops his understanding of the analogy of being from the standpoint of the absolute gratuity of grace in concert with de Lubac's *Surnaturel*. But given Balthasar's affinity with Platonism and Neo-Platonism, and of course his indebtedness

¹²³ Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics. A Theological Study of Making and Meaning*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1990), 122.

¹²⁴ O'Donoghue, 'Beauty', 1-10. See also my article, 'Theological Aesthetics or Aesthetic Theology? Some Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar' (forthcoming in *SJT*, Vol. 47, 1994).

¹²⁵ *GL* I:607.

to the great Western tradition, one is left in doubt, O'Donoghue asks, if he has actually departed from the nature and grace schema and has fully accepted the absorption of the natural by the supernatural.

The central drama of Balthasar's theology comes from the fact that he has accepted the disappearance of the traditional natural man and natural law philosophy in theology, but yet shows at every step that he has been formed in the old way and brings along with him, without looking at it directly, the central principle of the traditional way, the principle of the continuity of the natural and supernatural, the principle that Karl Barth called somewhat ambiguously the analogy of being.¹²⁶

Balthasar's affinity to the Western theological tradition and his intellectual formation in the Thomist school cannot be denied. But it must be remembered that along that same continuum of his intellectual development stands also the significant influence of Przywara, de Lubac and Barth. There is in Balthasar's theological aesthetics a genuine attempt to articulate his theology following the impulses of de Lubac's theology of grace, and Karl Barth's Christological focus. This has resulted, as we shall see later in our discussion, the concept of catalogical analogy which is a way of conceiving culture and theology, nature and grace, christologically and in a trinitarian fashion. Through catalogical analogy, Balthasar hopes to surmount the old nature-supernature mould of neo-scholasticism which postulates the *natura pura* and the impasse between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith which led Barth to what the Jesuit theologian calls a dead end. Is Balthasar's attempt to develop a rounder Christocentric approach successful? Has he taken the objections of Karl Barth seriously? Or has he glossed over quickly and carelessly the issues that Barth's theology have raised to develop the very kind of theology of correlation which Barth has so emphatically warn against? These questions can only be answered after looking

¹²⁶ O'Donoghue, 'Beauty', 6.

at the revelation theology of the great Reformed theologian. This is the task of the next three chapters.

PART TWO

THE THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

OF

KARL BARTH

CHAPTER IV

THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

The purpose of this and the following two chapters is to examine Barth's concept of theological knowledge. This chapter seeks to examine the main presuppositions behind Barth's theological epistemology, and his rejection of natural theology. Chapter V discusses Barth's revelation theology and the place of faith and reason in the knowledge of God. The final chapter in this part, Chapter VI, deals with the limits of man's knowledge of God in Barth's theology. As we shall see, though man's knowledge of God is limited, this limitation does not, for Barth, imply that it is therefore uncertain. Barth argues for the veracity of our knowledge of God. In this chapter we also see how Barth's theological anthropology shapes and determines his epistemology. We end our study of Barth by looking at his understanding of the nature of theology. We trace this understanding through Barth's study of Anselm, the eleventh century theologian to whom Barth is very much indebted.

1. Man Before God

Barth begins his discussion by arguing the thesis that the knowledge of God is the basic presupposition behind our articulation of God. He therefore begins not with the question 'whether God is knowable' but with the fact that Christians speak about God and that God is actually known in the Church through his Word. Discussion of the knowledge of God, then, begins with its own actuality and reality.¹

¹ CD II/1, 2-4.

The question whether God can be known is posed *in abstracto, a priori*. It presupposes that there is a standpoint and a criterion that is outside our real knowledge of God from which we can judge its possibility and its reality. Barth maintains that this pre-supposition is erroneous: our question about the knowability of God can only be asked *in concreto, a posteriori*. Hence the proper question to ask is not 'whether God is knowable' but 'how far, i.e., to what extent is God knowable'.² Epistemology is not the prolegomena to theology. Rather, theological epistemology is located within theology proper, that is, within the doctrine of God itself.³ Thus the problem of the knowledge of God can only be solved in virtue of the knowledge of God.⁴ Put differently, the knowledge of God must be considered inwardly on the basis of the Word of God and not outwardly to the exclusion of the Word. Barth's theory therefore stands formally among other human theories of knowledge, but materially his theory is exclusive. It postulates the outward problem of the knowledge of God as impossible.⁵

The object of our knowledge of God is given *a priori*, in the Word of God⁶ and nowhere else.⁷ Since God is the God of the Bible, Barth reasons, a knowledge of God that is based upon other determinants is impossible and therefore untrue.⁸

² CD II/1, 4-5, 29-30, 63, 65, 242-243.

³ CD II/1, 233.

⁴ CD II/1, 30; Cf., 170-1.

⁵ CD II/1, 30; Cf., 259-72.

⁶ CD II/1, 7, 32.

⁷ CD II/1, 224, 226.

⁸ CD II/1, 7, Cf., 26-7, 207.

Reason alone cannot succeed in coming to the knowledge of God.⁹ The force of this argument is perhaps felt best only if we listen to Barth's own words, 'Because it is bound to God's Word given to the Church, the knowledge of God with which we are concerned is bound to the God who in His Word gives Himself to the Church to be known as God. Bound in this way it is true knowledge of the true God'.¹⁰ Two conclusions follow. Firstly, the knowledge of God which is found in the constraints of the Word cannot be attacked; it is without anxiety and doubt. Barth's displeasure with apologetics is well known. And secondly, the natural knowledge of God, with its uncertainties and anxieties, cannot be a true knowledge of God. We cannot come to the knowledge of God by experimentation and discovery, but only from it by the work of God's grace.¹¹

The transcendent God who is the object of our knowledge makes himself accessible to man through revelation. This revelation is mediated and so man's knowledge of God is mediated knowledge. The knowledge of God then is two-fold. Firstly, in his Word God becomes the object to man the subject, and secondly, by his Holy Spirit he makes this subject accessible to him.¹² In this way Barth distinguishes his theory from all forms of pantheism which tend to unite object and subject.¹³ In similar vein Barth warns against the mysticism and subjectivism in the Augustinian sense of the *Confessions* (IX. 10) where the so-called *via negativa* reigns and the

⁹ CD II/1, 6-7.

¹⁰ CD II/1, 7.

¹¹ CD II/1, 8-9.

¹² CD II/1, 9-10.

¹³ CD II/1, 9-10.

objectivity of God is undermined.¹⁴

God in his objectivity is known by man solely by faith, which Barth defines as 'the total positive relationship of man to the God who gives himself to be known in His Word'.¹⁵ Faith is 'man's turning to God', man's 'Yes' to God, but this turning is entirely grounded in the fact that God demands that he do so in his Word; it is the work of grace.¹⁶ Trust, love and obedience to God are all determinants of total faith.¹⁷ Knowledge of God is included in faith since it is an orientation to God as object.¹⁸ Barth is careful to emphasise the importance of the objectivity of God in view of the modern abrogation of the theological concept of faith which reduces it to a mere religious desire in man. Without God as its object, Barth maintains, faith is nothing.¹⁹

Although God in as far as he is the object of our knowledge has a genuine objectivity like all other objects, his objectivity is in a sense different (because he is 'Wholly Other'). So is our knowledge of God different from our knowledge of natural objects. 'Knowledge of faith means fundamentally the union of man with the God who is distinct from him as well as from all his other objects. For this very reason this knowledge becomes and is a special knowledge distinct from the

¹⁴ *CD* II/1, 10-11.

¹⁵ *CD* II/1, 12.

¹⁶ *CD* II/1, 12.

¹⁷ *CD* II/1, 12.

¹⁸ *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM, 1988), 22-7. In this sense Barth's understanding of faith differs from that of Kierkegaard. The latter would not equate faith with knowledge.

¹⁹ *CD* II/1, 13-14.

knowledge of all other objects, outstanding in the range of all knowledge'.²⁰ Similarly, though God is also known as the object of our intuition (*Anschauung*) and concept (*Begriff*), our knowledge of him differs from that of a common thing in that our knowledge of the former is horizontal and the latter vertical.²¹

Barth distinguishes the primary objectivity of God, which is God as he knows himself, from the secondary objectivity of God, which refers to God as he is known to us through his revelation. The first kind of knowledge is immediate, and the second is mediate. The latter is based on the former; indeed the latter is made possible and constituted by former.²² However, the fact that man can know God only mediately, namely, through his clothed objectivity, does not mean that our knowledge of God is not real or true. Because God is true and trustworthy, our secondary knowledge of him in revelation does not lead us into error.²³ The knowledge of faith is always indirect knowledge since it is the objective knowledge of God through his special works which are the garments of his objectivity. Faith is satisfied with this veiled objectivity. Unbelief, however, not contented with this, tries in vain to venture beyond the parameter.²⁴ In his emphasis that man's knowledge of God is indirect, Barth is consistent not only with the older Reformed theologians but with Luther himself who stresses that in our knowledge of God, we are not to concern ourselves with the *nuda essentia* or *natura* of God, but with the *velamen*, the *volucra*, the *certa species*, and

²⁰ CD II/1, 15.

²¹ CD II/1, 8.

²² CD II/1, 15-6, Cf., 19-20, 26, 51-52, 205-206.

²³ CD II/1, 16, 49.

²⁴ CD II/1, 17-8.

the *larvae* of his works.

The problem here concerns what Barth means when he says that our knowledge has the same content with God's self knowledge. The secondary objectivity of God, Barth explains, is 'the objectivity which He has for us too in His revelation, in which He gives Himself to be known by us as He knows Himself'. 'It is distinguished from the primary objectivity', he continues, 'not by a lesser degree of truth, but by its particular form suitable for us, the creature'.²⁵ Though Barth is careful to distinguish between primary and secondary objectivity, he appears to have obliterated the difference between what the older theologians call the archetypal and ectypal knowledge of God. The former is the knowledge of God in himself, and the latter man's knowledge of God in his revelation. The ectypal knowledge of God is therefore that segment of the archetypal knowledge of God which he wishes man to know. It is conveyed in special revelation and constitutes the datum of theology. Barth appears to be saying here that our knowledge of God, indirect as it is, is nonetheless similar to God's knowledge of himself, i.e., his archetypal knowledge.

The knowledge of faith is a double-sided phenomenon. On the one hand it is like any other knowledge because it too has an object. But on the other hand, it is dissimilar to any other knowledge because its object is unique. It is because of this difference that we are to understand that the knowledge of faith must stem from the position of grace. It is a 'given' in that God posits himself as the object.²⁶ Thus the material object-signs through which God chooses to reveal himself cannot be used as a kind of atlas of revelation as if we can 'survey and master God from some sort of

²⁵ *CD* II/1, 16.

²⁶ *CD* II/1, 22.

humanly logical, ethical or religious precedence'.²⁷ Human logic, ethics and religion can only produce demons and dead gods.²⁸ God enables us to know him. This knowledge is not abstract but concrete, imparted to us by the free activity of God, which is grace.

The knowledge of faith which is the knowledge of God is in essence obedience to God. Obedience is defined as an 'act of human decision corresponding to the act of the divine being as the Living Lord; corresponding to the act of grace in which faith is grounded and continually again grounded in God'.²⁹ Prayer as the 'essentially necessary determination of the knowledge of God' has a central place in his theological epistemology. Prayer, and through it obedience, prevents us from falling into what he calls the trappings of over-objectification, i.e., 'a disinterested non-obedient consideration which holds back in a place which it thinks secure'. Prayer opens us to grace, without which there can be no knowledge of God. Barth also speaks of a Biblical cycle outside of which there can be no knowledge of God.

The will of God offers itself as good will towards man and is met by faith. Man with his will yields and becomes submissive to the will of God. Faith becomes the determination of his existence and therefore obedience. And in this way the knowledge of God takes place. According to the Bible, there is no knowledge of God outside this cycle.³⁰

²⁷ *CD II/1*, 23.

²⁸ *CD II/1*, 22, 23, 27.

²⁹ *CD II/1*, 26.

³⁰ *CD II/1*, 29.

2. God Before Man

In the previous section we saw that Barth's understanding of the knowledge of God is developed on the basis that man, as a knowing subject, stands before God who is the Object of man's knowledge. We saw that this act is made possible by the grace of God bestowed upon man. Thus the act of 'man before God' is necessarily preceded by the first and therefore primary act of 'God before man'. 'Knowledge of God comes into force as the knowledge of faith by God awakening man to faith; in and by his showing Himself to man as his object; and in and by His opening man's eyes to see God Himself in his objectivity'.³¹ This, as we saw above, implies that theological epistemology is an essential aspect of theology and cannot be seen as an independent prologomenon.

The question, 'Who then is this God who awakens man to faith?' must be addressed here. God, Barth asserts, is he whom we may (*dürfen*) love above all things. This obligation has the character of a permission, a liberation and an authorization (*Erlaubnis, Befreiung, Autorisierung*). This obligation has a three-fold implication: (1) that God is worthy of our love above all things and we cannot be disappointed loving him; (2) that God lets us know him in such a way as to open to us the possibility of loving him; and (3) that God effects in us a willingness to love him. Thus, this love involves the whole of our existence, it evokes within us a response to God's invitation.³²

Secondly, God is he whom we must fear above all things. This fear is not the same as that which perfect love casts out. In fact, this fear, Barth explains, is based

³¹ CD II/1, 31.

³² CD II/1, 33.

upon our duty to love God.³³ It is therefore absolutely indispensable. For without it, there is no faith, no trust, and no obedience. God is he whom we must fear above all things. This 'must' means that (1) God himself is in fact the one to be feared, so that there is really no escape from him; (2) he wills for us to fear him giving us the motives and grounds for so doing; and (3) he opens our eyes and ears to the reality that he is to be feared. The essence of this fear is that of extinction, not punishment. This is the real meaning of fear. Barth is here accused of adopting an existentialist concept of fear that is generally found in Jaspers and Sartre but specifically in Kierkegaard.³⁴ Barth maintains that our failure to use our given freedom to love and fear God could only lead to our total destruction.³⁵

The fact that our knowledge of God is of the existence of him whom we must fear above all things because we may love him above all things means that this knowledge is realised in our obedience to God. This obedience should be childlike, not slavish, seeing, not blind, free, and not coerced.³⁶ From his study of the New Testament,³⁷ Barth concludes that the relationship between faith and obedience must not be understood in such a way that obedience is seen either as a replacement or completion of the concept of faith, or even as something incidental happening alongside faith. Faith must be understood as obedience.³⁸ The knowledge of God that

³³ CD II/1, 34.

³⁴ See Matczak, *Karl Barth on God* (London: St Paul's Publications, 1962), 58.

³⁵ CD II/1, 34-35.

³⁶ CD II/1, 36.

³⁷ E.g. Rom. 1:5; 6:17; 16:5; Acts 6:7; 2 Thess 1:8; Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet 1:1-2, 14.

³⁸ CD II/1, 37-8.

springs from this love is true simply because it is from God.

In love we are set on the circular course in which there is no break, in which we can and shall only go further - from faith to faith, from knowledge to knowledge - never beginning with ourselves (and that means, with our own ability for faith and knowledge) but therefore also never ending with ourselves (and that means, with our own inability for faith and knowledge).³⁹

We move on to the second pair of concepts, mystery and clarity. Mystery corresponds to the fear of God while clarity corresponds to his love. The two concepts mystery and clarity can only be resolved in revelation. Just as fear is accompanied, determined and limited by the love of God, so is mystery accompanied, determined and limited by the clarity of God in his revelation. Barth maintains that this clarity and certainty can only come from God. If it is acquired through some other means, then our knowledge would not be the knowledge of God since, as we have seen earlier, the content of our knowledge must be identical with that of God's knowledge of himself. The following statement helps us to see Barth's point quite clearly.

The acknowledgement of the fact that revelation has taken place is faith, and the knowledge with which the revelation that has taken place begins is the knowledge of faith. And for the knowledge of faith, the existence of God is the problem already solved in and by the clarity and certainty of the existence of God Himself in His revelation.⁴⁰

By so stressing the indispensability of supernatural faith in our knowledge of God, Barth stands in direct contradiction with Thomistic and Catholic theology according to which faith completes natural cognition and does not contradict reason.⁴¹ For this

³⁹ *CD II/1*, 37-8.

⁴⁰ *CD II/1*. 40.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I. 3-8.

reason, some critics have reacted adversely to Barth's so-called wholesale rejection of the use of reason. Others attempted to point to an inconsistency in his method arguing that while on the one hand Barth resorts to a kind of fideism, on the other hand he uses reason more than faith in the actual outworking of his system.⁴² But surely this is a misinterpretation of Barth's intentions and purposes and a blurring of the distinctive ways in which reason is used. Barth is indeed a rational theologian⁴³ - his whole project is an attempt to formulate 'proof' in the Anselmian sense from revelation. In his rejection of the power of reason to appropriate the true knowledge of God independently, Barth is echoing the teaching of the older Reformed Dogmaticians.⁴⁴ Reason in Barth has only an instrumental, not magisterial, function (*usus instrumentalis, non usus magisterialis*). The certitude of our knowledge of God is the knowledge of faith. So important was it for Barth that this certitude and clarity of our knowledge of God be emphasised that he went on to assert that in the light of the existence of God, our own existence is less evident to us.⁴⁵

Because God is known to us in clarity and certainty, he also remains a mystery to us. 'Mystery' means that God is and remains the One whom we know only because he gives himself to be known. Thus the ineffability of God stems from the fact that the knowledge of God in clarity and certainty is made possible by him in his self-

⁴² Robert Crawford, 'The Theological Method of Karl Barth', *SJT*, 25 (1972), 331-2.

⁴³ See Colin Gunton, *Becoming and Being* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 218.

⁴⁴ For example Quenstedt wrote, 'Human or natural reason is not the source of theology and supernatural things' (*Doctrin. Theol.*, I, 38); quoted by Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St Louis: Concordia, 1934), 16.

⁴⁵ *CD* II/1, 39.

disclosure; its actuality and therefore its possibility is due to his permission. In other words, the possibility of this knowledge constitutes the divine power (*Macht*), the actuality of it (*Tatsächlichkeit*) is the actuality of the divine will and decision (*seines Willens und Beschlusses*), and the consequence of the process of this knowledge is ultimately the deliberate arrangement (*Anordnung*) of the divine wisdom (*Weisheit*).⁴⁶ ‘Mystery’ means that God can only be known in his own light: ‘... we can gather all that has to be said about the fulfilment of the knowledge of God in the final statement that God is known through God and through God alone’.⁴⁷ In this way God is sovereign: He permits us this knowledge of him. Either we know him as Master or we do not know him at all.⁴⁸ Man the creature, in and by himself, has no ability to grasp God at all.

Barth asserts that God, in his sovereignty, knows how to act on man in an objective and cogent way.⁴⁹ In the light of this Barth is in opposition to the Schleiermacherian theology of ‘religious experience’, accusing it of subjectivism and a pre-occupation with experiences and emotions rather than God’s truth as it is revealed in his Word.⁵⁰ The question here is, could Barth’s theory escape from

⁴⁶ CD II/1, 40. Cf., *Dogmatik* II/1, 43.

⁴⁷ CD II/1, 44.

⁴⁸ CD II/1, 45.

⁴⁹ CD II/1, 47.

⁵⁰ CD II/1, 73-4. For Barth, what Schleiermacher and the Protestant theology that followed regarded as an important subject, i.e., the pre-occupation with the religious man and his piety, the Reformers did not regard as important at all. It is understandable then that when Barth traced his spiritual ancestry from Kierkegaard through to Luther and Calvin and to Paul and Jeremiah, he added significantly that ‘it does not include Schleiermacher’. Cf., John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931), 72.

subjectivism? The knowledge of God, according to Barth, comes to us through God's revelation. But how do we know that we are subjects of God's special revelation? It does seem to us that Barth cannot answer this question without appealing to personal conviction, even if this is seen in the larger context of community.

Barth proceeds to argue that our knowledge of God, which is based on his revelation, is the result of his activity as Trinity. The knowledge of God is possible only because God truly knows himself; he stands before himself. 'This occurrence in God himself is the essence and strength of our knowledge of God'.⁵¹ The reality and the actuality of our knowledge of God proceeds from the reality and actuality of God's self-knowledge. Though derived and therefore secondary, our knowledge of God is the consequence of 'the fact that knowledge of God is real as God's own hidden work in his being as the triune God from eternity to eternity'.⁵²

The veiled objectivity of God's self-disclosure to us in the creaturely realm, discussed summarily in the last section, must be reiterated again at this juncture. The following passage gives a succinct elucidation of what might be called Barth's 'sacramental' understanding of revelation.

But God gives Himself to be known - and this is the limitation that we have to bring out in the idea of impartation - in *an objectivity different from his own, in a creaturely objectivity*. He unveils Himself as the *One He is* by veiling Himself in a form *He Himself is not*. He uses this form distinct from Himself, He uses its work and sign, in order to be objective in, with and under this form, and therefore to give Himself to be known. Revelation *means the giving of signs*. We can say quite simply that revelation *means sacrament*, i.e., the self-witness of God, the representation of His truth, and therefore the truth in which He knows Himself, in the form of creaturely objectivity and therefore in

⁵¹ CD II/1, 49.

⁵² CD II/1, 50.

the form which is adapted to our creaturely knowledge.⁵³ (*Italics mine*).

Barth's insistence that the modalities of revelation which at once reveals and obscures can lead us to a *theologica archetypa* caused him to draw a further conclusion that either God is known to us in his entirety or he is not known at all.⁵⁴ Further knowledge of God is indeed possible, but it cannot be conceived as quantitative knowledge: 'a further knowledge of God will only lead us deeper into just this entirety of His being'.⁵⁵ This position in a sense forces Barth to take the Triune God as the only possible point of departure for the knowledge of God.⁵⁶ The difficulty with this line of argument, however, comes to the fore when we consider the knowledge of God in the Old Testament. Barth argues that the concept of the Trinity is incipient in the Old Testament. But the point is that if the idea of the Trinity is not fully present in the Old Testament, what are we to make of the knowledge of God of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament? If we were to push Barth's point to its most logical conclusion, we would have to say that the prophets of the Old Testament had no real knowledge of God at all, since for Barth, God must be known in his entirety or he is not known at all. But if we grant that the prophets' knowledge of God is indeed authentic, albeit incomplete and preparatory, then we are led to the conclusion contrary to Barth that the idea of the one God who is the supreme and

⁵³ CD II/1, 52.

⁵⁴ CD II/1, 51.

⁵⁵ CD II/1, 52.

⁵⁶ Cf., CD II/1, 49. Barth's trinitarian theology however began as early as his Göttingen days. Thus in his *Göttingen Dogmatics* he could already write that he regarded 'the doctrine of the Trinity as the true centre of the concept of revelation' (131).

unique Being is indeed valid, and that the concept of God as Trinity does not contradict the fundamental notion that God is One, Unique and Supreme Being.

Before we conclude this section, we need to consider two more points in Barth's argument. The first has to do with Barth's contention that God in his revelation is recognised as the 'Thou'. God knows himself as the 'I', as the object and subject in itself and for itself. We know him differently in that we know him only through his revelation as something different from us. Hence we know him as 'Thou' only indirectly albeit truly and really. Our knowledge of God as 'Thou' and our knowledge of human persons also differ.⁵⁷ We recognise others by applying to them, by analogy, our own self-knowledge. We cannot do this with God since as creatures we depend entirely upon him for our being.⁵⁸ Barth is thus in opposition to the Catholic notion of the analogy of being which establishes some similarity between Creator and creature. Our knowledge of God cannot be approached from anthropology but must begin with the analysis of God himself. Jesus Christ, then, is the concrete being through whom we recognise God as 'Thou'. Through him the reciprocity between God and man is created.⁵⁹ Our second point is regarding Barth's understanding that our knowledge of God is temporal, imperfect and progressive. As such it differs from God's self-knowledge which 'happens at a stroke and once and for all in the same perfection from eternity to eternity'.⁶⁰ Our knowledge of God is

⁵⁷ *CD* II/1, 58-59.

⁵⁸ *CD* II/1, 59.

⁵⁹ *CD* II/1, 60-61.

⁶⁰ *CD* II/1, 61.

therefore attained in time and by repetition (*zeitlich und wiederholungsbedürftig*).⁶¹

Moreover this repetition does not depend on us but on God alone. Our knowledge of God is from God and is effected by God and God alone. That God is 'ready' to bestow man this knowledge is the subject of our next section.

3. The Readiness of God

Having completed his exploration of the 'knowledge of God in its fulfilment', Barth now focuses his attention on its possibility and basis. For Barth, this is the only correct approach. The subject must be considered by way of descent, starting from the fact that we do know God. It thus begins *a priori* from God. The alternative approach, namely the way of ascent is for Barth 'grasping', 'self-autonomous' and 'untheological'.⁶²

The possibility of man's knowledge of God, must be considered from two aspects. The first is from the perspective of God's readiness. This, as we shall see, is absolutely vital and primary. 'The superordinate, and therefore in the last resort not only the superordinate but the only readiness which we have to understand and explain as the knowability of God, is the readiness that is grounded in the nature and activity,

⁶¹ CD II/1, 62. Cf. *Dogmatik* II/1, 67.

⁶² CD II/1, 63-64. Barth's theology of religion is well known. He sees religion as unbelief being the concern of godless man. In religion we 'lock the door against God, we alienate ourselves from Him, we come into direct opposition to him' (CD I/2, 309). Unlike Balthasar who understood Christ as the fulfilment of the religious longings of man, Barth argues that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ contradicts and displaces human religion. 'Jesus Christ does not fill out and improve all the different attempts of man to think of God and to represent Him according to his own standard. But as the self-ordaining and self-manifestation of God He replaces and completely outbids those attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong' (CD I/2, 308).

the being and existence of God. He is the Lord of the event which we call the knowledge of God. He is also the substance of the possibility (*Inbegriff der Möglichkeit*), presuppositions (*Voraussetzung^{en}*) and conditions (*Bedingung^{en}*) of this event'.⁶³ The second is from the perspective of man's readiness. This too is important, for without the readiness on the part of man, the knowledge of God cannot be actualised.⁶⁴

In other words the readiness of God is rooted in his essence (*Wesen*) and his action (*Handeln*). The possibility of the knowledge of God is the function of the readiness of God.⁶⁵ Consequently, human readiness is really not self-supporting or autonomous, but is rooted in God's readiness. There can ultimately be only one readiness - the readiness of God. Human readiness consists of his willingness to be grateful and obedient.⁶⁶ The real man is he who stands before God.

Barth again begins with God himself. As we have seen, for Barth, the knowledge of God is only possible because God knows himself.⁶⁷ God is Truth; he is the Truth and not only a truth. Truth means the unhiddenness (*Unverborgenheit*) of God. The essence of all truth lies in the fact that God is open to himself in his Trinitarian relationship. But this does not mean that all created beings which are open to God can therefore participate in the truth of God. Neither can it be argued that

⁶³ CD II/1, 67.

⁶⁴ CD II/1, 65-66.

⁶⁵ See Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), 76.

⁶⁶ CD II/1, 66.

⁶⁷ CD II/1, 67-68.

since all created things are open to us, we can therefore reach God. Barth rejects this salient feature in scholastic theology by emphasising the yawning gulf that separates man from God. God is known only when he offers his openness to fallen man through his revelation.⁶⁸ There can be no analogy whatsoever between man and God. That is to say, there can be no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord can be accessible to us. Human notions about lordship can only hinder us from understanding the lordship of God. This can be understood only through revelation.⁶⁹ There can be no analogy on the basis of which the nature of God as Creator can be accessible to us. Our attempt to contemplate this from below, i.e., from the cosmos, could only lead to futility and will in the end make God the Creator superfluous. There can be no analogy on the basis of which God the Reconciler and Redeemer can be accessible to us. Though we have witnessed many reconciliations, the act of God when he makes peace with the world is very different. Similarly redemption 'does not mean that the world and we ourselves within it evolve in this or that direction. It means that Jesus Christ is coming again. Redemption means the resurrection of the flesh. It means eternal life as deliverance from eternal death'.⁷⁰ All this we can know only through God's revelation.

Man does not have the power to control God's revelation: 'God's revelation is not in our power, and therefore not at our command. God's revelation takes place among us and for us, in the sphere of our experience and our thinking'.⁷¹ Truth is

⁶⁸ *CD II/1*, 68, 199, 228-229.

⁶⁹ *CD II/1*, 75-76.

⁷⁰ *CD II/1*, 78.

⁷¹ *CD II/1*, 69.

God's truth and as such it is effected by God himself from outside man.⁷² The criterion then, is grace and not the intelligibility of the object or the *evidentia objectiva*.⁷³ Here Barth differs from Balthasar who seems to suggest, albeit ever so cautiously, that the form has the ability to impress upon the beholder its evidential beauty of the form.⁷⁴

The polemic of Barth is self-evident at this point. He wages war against the theological epistemologies that have arisen in the philosophy and theology of the 18th and 19th centuries. Against the anthropocentrisms of those who postulate that the revelation of God can be found in the exercise of man's practical reason (Kant), who locate God's revelation in and through man's immediate experience or religious consciousness (Schleiermacher), who teach that the impersonal absolute spirit became self-conscious (and in this way personal) in man (Hegel), who subjugate theology to anthropology (Feuerbach), and who claim that the idea of God was innate in man (Ritschl), Barth champions the theocentrism of the Reformers with a view of inflicting a mortal wound to the titanism of his day.⁷⁵ He beckons theologians not to yield to the temptation to follow the footsteps of these thinkers. By abstaining from the

⁷² Here as in many other aspects of Barth's thought, the influence of Kierkegaard shines brilliantly.

⁷³ *CD* II/1, 12, 15, 16, 69, 240-1; I/1, 5-13, 47ff. See also Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, 16-17, 20-21, 76, 80-81.

⁷⁴ See Chapter 2 above.

⁷⁵ See J. McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, especially chapters II 'A Bomb on the Playground of the Theologians' and IV 'Barth as a Witness to the Word of God'; Philip Almond, 'Karl Barth and Anthropocentric Theology', *SJT* 31 () 435-447, and T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), especially chapter 2, 'The Intellectual Context of Barth's Thought', 27ff.

encroachment from our side, we become aware of the encroachment that comes from God, which is the act of grace. It is this grace alone, which Barth defines as 'the majesty, the freedom, the undeservedness, the unexpectedness, the newness, the arbitrariness, in which the relationship to God and therefore the possibility of knowing him is opened up to man by God himself',⁷⁶ that enables us to come to the knowledge of God. This grace is God's good pleasure. Hence Barth could write quite unqualifiably that 'God's good pleasure is his knowability'; in it we have the certainty of the true knowledge of God.⁷⁷

4. The Readiness of Man

Simply put, the readiness of man is the dependence and openness of the creature upon the Creator. This readiness cannot be seen as an independent factor (as in Natural Theology) alongside God's readiness as if it has, in itself, powers of its own. Rather the readiness of man is delimited by the readiness of God and subsequent to it.⁷⁸ In this way, the readiness of man must be understood as the readiness for grace. This readiness or openness is analysed by considering the difference between the need (*Bedürfnlichkeit*), recognition (*Erkenntnis*) and willingness (*Willigkeit*) to accept the grace of God. Need has two aspects, the need of the knowledge of God, and the need for grace, without which there can be no knowledge. Recognition is the

⁷⁶ CD II/1, 74.

⁷⁷ CD II/1, 75.

⁷⁸ CD II/1, 128-129. See also Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, 76-81.

knowledge of this need, and willingness is the disposition of man to respond to grace.⁷⁹

For Barth all this becomes actual only by God's action. By himself man is unable to become aware of his need. He is closed to God.

The deepest and most real need of man for the miracle of grace does not lie in the fact that he needs it objectively, and that he has objective need that it should come to him as grace, but in the fact that he is in a position to cover up and hide from himself this need of his, to be to himself, and - even if illusorily - to God also, not this needy man, but a rich man who can live without God's grace and who can even allot it to himself.⁸⁰

Barth attributes this closedness of man to sin. Man as sinner is 'willing to live as a needy man', even in his greatest need he will 'not be able to help feeling and behaving at some point as the rich man who knows very well how to come to terms with his need and therefore knows very well how to live otherwise than a real pauper'.⁸¹ If we are to understand Barth's theological epistemology properly, we must first understand his theological anthropology, especially his concept of sin and its implications. '[W]e have to understand man better than he wants to understand himself: namely, as the man who is really entangled in guilt and really submerged in death; as the man who in one way or another is really filled with fear and despair'.⁸² Statements like this should be considered with all seriousness because in them we see the very crux of Barth's rejection of human autonomy and the way of natural theology.

⁷⁹ *CD* II/1, 129-130.

⁸⁰ *CD* II/1, 130.

⁸¹ *CD* II/1, 131.

⁸² *CD* II/1, 132.

Man is not at peace, but at war with grace.⁸³ Though he may come to understand grace, he will not embrace it. Theoretically he may acknowledge the necessity of grace, but practically he will reject it. Thus the openness to God and our readiness for him is totally lacking for 'even our deepest reality is still separated by an abyss from our openness for God's grace and therefore from the knowability of God for us'.⁸⁴ Already we see how Balthasar parts company with Barth here. Balthasar no doubt agrees with Barth's emphasis on grace and the indispensability of God's revelation, but his understanding of nature and grace permits him to speak at least of a theological *a priori* in man where his openness, his 'seeking after God' is given a more positive interpretation. Barth would be highly suspicious of such claims which to him would open the gateway to natural theology or is in fact natural theology masquerading in the language of grace.

We must not make use of anthropological postulates when we attempt to provide a positive answer to the question regarding the readiness of man because though postulates of this kind can be formulated very accurately and precisely, they can be of no value in so far as their 'presupposition and therefore the measure of their material determination is man: man who cannot simply be re-interpreted as though he were a friend of grace instead of an enemy ...'⁸⁵ For Barth, the same can be said about the ecclesiological view point for even here the humanness of man cannot be

⁸³ *CD* II/1, 133.

⁸⁴ *CD* II/1, 134.

⁸⁵ *CD* II/1, 144.

undermined.⁸⁶ Our question can be answered only from the view-point of Christology.

Anthropological and ecclesiological assertions arise only as they are borrowed from Christology. That is to say, no anthropological or ecclesiological assertion is true in itself as such. Its truth subsists in the assertions in Christology, or rather in the reality of Jesus Christ alone ... We can, therefore, anticipate the positive answer to our question by stating simply that the readiness of man included in the readiness of God is Jesus Christ. And therefore Jesus Christ is the knowability of God on our side, as he is the grace of God itself, and therefore also the knowability of God on God's side.⁸⁷

By starting with Christology, Barth is arguing that man's openness to God is transcendent to man and can therefore only be imparted to him from above. Truth is unattainable to man. It is transcendent and is realised only in Jesus Christ.

'But who is this Jesus Christ that we must say this of Him, and can say it of Him only; and can say it of man and therefore of ourselves only as we first and properly say it of Him?'⁸⁸ Barth answers his own question by pointing to the fact that Jesus Christ is truly God and man; in him we meet with 'the only begotten, unique and eternal Son of God, and therefore God Himself; and therefore always the One who is ready and open for God and to whom God is knowable'.⁸⁹ Here Barth weaves his theological epistemology with soteriology. Better, it is in the context of soteriology that a sound theological epistemology can be conceived. Emphasis is made on the vicarious and substitutionary nature of Jesus Christ. In Christ the whole of

⁸⁶ *CD II/1*, 142-145. Barth is here not considering the ecclesiological man in relationship with Christ as such, but rather only as a member of the human race.

⁸⁷ *CD II/1*, 149-150.

⁸⁸ *CD II/1*, 150.

⁸⁹ *CD II/1*, 151.

mankind can know God and through him participate in the archetypal knowledge of God.⁹⁰ Through his death and resurrection Christ gave new life to man who upon receiving it becomes open to God in Christ.

In him the enmity of man against the grace of God is overcome, therefore man is no more outside, where God must be unknowable to him because he does not accept the grace in which God makes himself knowable to him. He is inside, where God is knowable to himself, the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, where in the Son, therefore, God is also knowable to man.⁹¹

This participation is a participation of faith in Christ. The life of faith is life in the Spirit of God. Faith precedes our intuitions and concepts.⁹² It bespeaks of a relationship with God through Christ and this in turn means that we have abandoned our standing for the 'real standing in which we no longer stand on ourselves'.⁹³

The closedness of man to God is not the final and proper thing to be said about man. The final and proper thing to be said about man is that 'we have peace with God (Rom. 5:11), and in this peace we stand in such a relationship to God that the knowability of God which he has bestowed upon us in His grace is received and accepted as such by us'.⁹⁴ This peace is found only in Jesus Christ. We must not look in any other direction: 'our question is not answered at all if it is put and

⁹⁰ *CD II/1*, 153-154.

⁹¹ *CD II/1*, 153.

⁹² *CD II/1*, 201.

⁹³ 'We abandon it for a real standing in which we no longer stand on ourselves (on our moral and religious, or even our Christian state), and in which we obviously do not stand on our faith as such, but - now at last firmly and securely - on the ground of the truth of God and therefore on the ground of the reconciliation which has taken place in Jesus Christ and is confirmed by him to all eternity'. Cf. *CD II/1*, 159.

⁹⁴ *CD II/1*, 161.

answered with apodeictic certainty. But this certainty depends upon whether it is put and answered under the christological aspect of man, and under the christological aspect alone'.⁹⁵

5. Natural Theology

We come now to the most controversial aspects of Barth's thought, namely, his absolute rejection of natural theology. To be sure this rejection issued from years of intellectual struggle for Barth. His rejection of natural theology must be understood as a reaction to the movement in theology that had become so powerful and so blinding in his own day. It is the rejection of anthropocentric theology - the reductionism of theology into anthropology. His reaction can be clearly seen when he wrote the following about his former theological teachers:

I suddenly realised that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, nineteenth century no longer held any future.⁹⁶

Reflecting on this theme Philip Almond writes as follows:

Barth, in rejecting the main trends of theology from Schleiermacher onwards and the earlier Kantian philosophy of religion, was rejecting every notion of the necessity of, or even the possibility of, the grounding of God since it was his conviction that German theology, in endeavouring to do this, had confused the truth of God with the truth of man. Barth's attack was directed against what he saw as its basic error - it had become anthropocentric theology.⁹⁷

Barth was also fighting the battle on another front. Across the borders of his own ecclesiastical tradition Barth was also engaging with the natural theology of

⁹⁵ CD II/1, 162.

⁹⁶ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Fontana, 1971), 13.

⁹⁷ Almond, 'Karl Barth', 438.

Roman Catholicism. The Vatican's teaching on natural theology can be seen clearly in the following two statements.

The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the light of human reason from the things that he created; for since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made (Rom 1:20).⁹⁸

Canon 1: If anyone says that the one and true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known with the natural light of human reason by means of things that have been made: let him be anathema.⁹⁹

Barth rejects the above. To him the position of the Council smacks of heresy since it assumes that there can be a distinction between God as *rerum omnium principium et finis*, i.e., God who can be known by man's natural power, and the *Deus noster*, i.e., the God of the Bible who is really the true God. That is to say, the position of the Council suggests for Barth that there can be a distinction between the noetic God and the ontic God. Barth rejects this dissolution of the unity of God. God has to be known as he exists.¹⁰⁰ This argument is consistently maintained by Barth throughout his debate with natural theology. As we shall see, this is the fundamental premise which led Barth to reject not natural theology but general revelation as well. Closely connected to this is Barth's rejection of the Catholic doctrine of analogy, particularly the doctrine of the *analogia entis*. We have alluded to this problem earlier and will return to it later to discuss it at great length. For the purposes of the present discussion it is sufficient to say that this doctrine is anathema for Barth because it

⁹⁸ Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Barcelona, 1946), np. 1785, Cf., no. 1786; quoted by Matczak, *Karl Barth on God*, 221-222.

⁹⁹ Cf., Denzinger, no. 1806, n. 1801. Quoted by Matczak, *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁰⁰ CD II/1, 81-82; 83-84.

makes the difference between God and man quantitative and not qualitative. The doctrine also makes the knowledge of God possible independently of revelation and grace.¹⁰¹

With this background in mind, we are now ready for a close examination of Barth's argument against natural theology. Barth's objections to natural theology are consistent with his theory of the knowledge of God. The reader will recall that Barth's theory begins with the actuality of this knowledge in the Church. It begins with God himself - the knowledge of God is possible only because God knows himself.¹⁰² God cannot be known apart from his self-disclosure and apart from the work of grace. Thus it is consistent for Barth to reject natural theology since his definition of it is 'every (positive and negative) system which claims to be theological, i.e., to interpret divine revelation, whose subject however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose methods therefore differ equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture'.¹⁰³ Natural theology cannot be considered as a preparation for the gospel; the natural knowledge of God has led man to create God in his own image. Its anthropocentrism leads to a dead-end in which all talk about God is idolatrous. Denial of natural theology involves therefore nothing less than self-abnegation. 'It involves self-denial to deny the basic idea of all natural theology, no matter whether it has been explicitly evolved and developed or not'.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, for Barth, all

¹⁰¹ *CD* II/1, 188, 243.

¹⁰² *CD* II/1, 67-68.

¹⁰³ Quoted by Robert Crawford, 'The Theological Method of Karl Barth', *SJT* 25 (1972), 320.

¹⁰⁴ *CD* II/1, 136.

forms of natural theology are attempts to 'domesticate' God in the service of human interest.¹⁰⁵

Underlining Barth's theory of the knowledge of God and consequently his rejection of natural theology is the basic theological assumption that God's noetic absoluteness is based on his ontic absoluteness. In other words, because of God's ontic absoluteness, his noetic absoluteness is 'inevitable'.¹⁰⁶ By ontic absoluteness is meant the absolute uniqueness of God's being, and by noetic absoluteness Barth postulates that all genuine knowledge of God derives from revelation: knowledge is not only initiated but controlled by God.¹⁰⁷ Thus true knowledge of God is attributed solely to the being and action of God himself.¹⁰⁸ In the ontological mode this means that if God is the one absolute being then it is necessarily impossible for creatures to know him by their own rational powers alone. Epistemologically it means that if we do in fact possess an adequate concept of God, and Barth assumes this, then these concepts cannot have been framed by our own rational powers alone.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ For example through Schleiermacher European Christianity is totally absorbed and assimilated to the bourgeois culture of his time until it only appears as a manifestation of that culture. Cf. T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Cf., *CD II/1*, 310-311. Especially 311: 'Behind this noetic absoluteness of God there stands decisively his ontic. This is decisive because in God's revelation it is really a question of His ontic absoluteness, from which his noetic absoluteness inevitably follows'.

¹⁰⁷ *CD II/1*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ *CD II/1*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Brown has argued that the statement that God's noetic absoluteness derives from his ontic absoluteness appears to be a *non sequitur*. But this is only true if the concept of the *analogia entis* is admitted into the scheme. Thus from the perspective of the analogy of being, which Brown defines as a theological method in which theology is done 'as an adjunct to ontology, so that one envisages God as a

This is why the theological epistemology that is laid out in Thomistic philosophy is an impossible venture for Karl Barth. The realism of Thomistic philosophy starts from the creature. It argues that by unaided reason we can know God as the first mover, the supreme and absolute being. God therefore is the being who contains all the perfections found in creatures but in an infinitely more perfect way.¹¹⁰ Revelation would supply the rest.¹¹¹ The knowledge of the Triune God that comes only by revelation does not however contradict the knowledge of God attained by reason. Thomistic philosophy does not doubt, as Barth does, that the God of reason, that is, the 'first cause', 'prime mover', is actually the true God.¹¹² While the content of revelation is ultimately known by faith, reason can indeed lead us to a knowledge of the possibility and fact of God's revelation.¹¹³ Balthasar's attempt to baptise this whole approach in the name of grace would appear highly suspect for Barth. His attempt to rename the religious a priori appears to be nothing other than

being, albeit the highest one, within the hierarchical series of beings. Such a God would be cognisable according to the same categories applicable to creatures and thereby would be accessible also via nature and not exclusively via grace'. Cf. 'On God's ontic and noetic absoluteness: A Critique of Barth', *SJT* 33, 541. On the basis of this Brown could say that theologians like Nicholas of Cusa, Aquinas and Tillich have no difficulties with an approach 'from below' as it were. But Barth considers the whole concept of the analogy of being and the corresponding theological method as anathema. For him to speak of the ontic absoluteness of God is to pronounce the Catholic notion of analogy totally inadmissible since it suggests that the difference between God and creatures is only one of degree. Furthermore, even if the *analogia entis* is allowed as a valid way of describing reality, it does not mean that the objective reality automatically imply the subjective perception and knowledge of that reality. Do we not have here a *non sequitur*?

¹¹⁰ *ST* I.q.2, a.2-3; q.13.a.2; *C. Gent.* I.c. 13-14, 30, III.c.38-40.

¹¹¹ *ST.* I. q. 32, a. 1. 12, a. 4, et. 12. I. q. 39a.7.

¹¹² *ST.* I. q. 2. Heroical. q. 3-4, 12; *C. Gent.* I. c. 10-14, 29, 36.

¹¹³ *ST.* II. II. q. 2, a. 4; *C. Gent.* c. 7; III. c. 98-100.

another form of a *theologia naturalis*.

In a similar vein, Barth objects to the Roman Catholic principle of causality. We shall see the force of this objection when we look at the problem of analogy. The point to be made at this juncture is that Barth's objection is based on his understanding of the ontic and noetic absoluteness of God, which makes it impossible for the relationship between God and the world to be reversed. Scholastic theology affirms that God is a totally different being, i.e., he is *ipsum esse subsistens*, whereas finite beings are dependent and composed. Still there is this creational relationship ('cause' and 'create' are used interchangeably) between God and his creation. To be sure Barth does not deny this relationship and is most willing to speak of an *analogia relationis*, his objection lies in the principle of causality which warrants the application of the perfections of the creature *via affirmationis* to God even though it is elevated to an infinite grade, i.e., *via supereminetiae*. This is impossible simply because we do not know God. Natural knowledge deals with the given; God is non-given. Furthermore this procedure results in abstractions which Barth rejects. For him the relationship with God cannot be obtained by abstraction but only through the concrete action of God. The knowledge of God is possible only through the action of God. Natural theology as 'the attempt of man to answer the riddle of his own existence and of that of the world, and in that way to master himself and the world' is not only doomed to failure but is positively dangerous as it leads man to a false god, an idol, and not to the knowledge of the real God.¹¹⁴ More about this later. For the moment we must turn to other concerns.

Might it not be argued that there are at least some 'justification' for natural

¹¹⁴ CD II/1, 85, 87-88.

theology from the pedagogic and pastoral standpoints? Could there not be a case for natural theology when we look at the matter from the standpoint of Tillich's apologetic theology or Brunner's 'eristics'? Could natural theology not provide that proverbial common ground, the basis of conversation between the Church and the world? Barth answers in the negative and has no qualms whatsoever about calling such intentions and procedures 'childish'.¹¹⁵ There can be no *preambulae fidei*. The knowledge of such gods in its diversity cannot provide a preparation for the knowledge of the real God. For Barth any such attempt would not only lead us to the Roman Catholic dissolution of the unity of God but also an abstract consideration of his being. 'The establishment of the knowledge of the one god or all the gods in question cannot, therefore, be advertised as a preliminary step towards the establishment of the knowability of the real God'.¹¹⁶ Preparation for faith must depend exclusively on God.¹¹⁷ Barth argues that if natural theology can bring man to a knowledge of God, then it can also lead man to salvation since for Barth faith and knowledge of God are identified with salvation.¹¹⁸ Aware that some scholars have interpreted Anselm as an apologist, Barth explains that Anselm's method cannot be understood as 'apologetics' in the modern sense. 'Since he believes (i.e. the Creed), he wants to know it and prove it'. He therefore concludes that Anselm 'is not the right man to appeal to as the patron saint of natural theology'.¹¹⁹ But the question

¹¹⁵ CD II/1, 88-89.

¹¹⁶ CD II/1, 91.

¹¹⁷ CD II/1, 91.

¹¹⁸ CD II/1, 90, 92-93.

¹¹⁹ CD II/1, 92-93, 184, 190-191, 195, 305.

remains: How then can a Christian talk to an unbeliever, the Church to the world, faith to unbelief? Barth answers:

If we are going to address this other person from faith with any prospect of being heard by him, then we must say to him what we have to say to him out of faith. He can then come to grips with it, and it will be able to bring him to the point of decision, and therefore to the decision of faith itself.¹²⁰

Thus not only does natural theology have no pedagogical use, its very procedure, according to Barth, is insincere.¹²¹

Barth argues that natural theology has no biblical basis whatsoever. On a superficial level, Barth explains, it is possible for one to raise a whole strand in scriptures that appears to summon or at least to invite us to a natural theology.¹²² But this line of interpretation seems to ignore the fact that the Biblical witness appeals to God alone and does not look past him.¹²³ There is nothing in the Bible to show that there is an immediate or direct natural theology. In his consideration of the 19th Psalm, Barth argues that the 'gospel' of the psalm, if taken as a whole begins its declaration of the glory of the Lord by pointing to the Exodus.¹²⁴ 'After He has made Himself visible in His action, [God] now also (but always as this One who acts) becomes visible in heaven and on earth and in everything which is therein'.¹²⁵ Even the nature psalms do not lead us in any way, in the context of Israel's understanding

¹²⁰ *CD* II/1, 92.

¹²¹ *CD* II/1, 93-94.

¹²² *CD* II/1, 100.

¹²³ *CD* II/1, 100.

¹²⁴ *CD* II/1, 101.

¹²⁵ *CD* II/1, 107-108.

of God's actions, to find a 'representation of the conscience and omnipotence of God in *abstracto*'.¹²⁶ Barth concludes with these words: 'Therefore on formal grounds of exegesis we cannot say that it is possible to demonstrate in the Psalter an independent witness to man in the cosmos as such'.¹²⁷

Barth adopts the same approach in his exegesis of Romans 1 & 2. Paul's epistle is grounded on God's ἀποκαλύψις. Paul is therefore not speaking about the heathen in general. 'The Jews and the heathen of whom he speaks are very definitely characterised as Jews and heathen objectively confronted with the divine ἀποκαλύψις in the gospel (1:15-16)'.¹²⁸ The gospel is the theme of the whole epistle and Paul is speaking as an apostle and not as a religious and historical philosopher. Thus Paul was, according to Barth, speaking in the light of the evangelical kerygma.¹²⁹

Barth's interpretation of this passage is of course not universal.¹³⁰ Barth's exegesis is coloured by his own theological prejudice and epistemological theory. The 'side line' does not contradict the 'main line' of the gospel. There cannot be a natural theology which stands alongside special revelation even if it is seen to be occupying only a secondary place. The 'sideline' is derived from revelation and not from any other authority.¹³¹ The content of the Bible 'constitutes a single witness, and this is

¹²⁶ CD II/1, 108.

¹²⁷ CD II/1, 108.

¹²⁸ CD II/1, 119. For a fuller exposition of Rom. 1.18ff, see CD I/2, 304ff.

¹²⁹ CD II/1, 120.

¹³⁰ See for instance, Calvin's interpretation in his *Comm. on Rom.*, James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1984), 50ff; and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 163ff.

¹³¹ CD II/1, 110.

to be understood strictly and exclusively as the witness of God's revelation of grace in his covenant with Israel and the fulfilment of the promise of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh'.¹³² The Bible cannot be regarded as a product of human systematisation where a 'Yes' and a 'No' can stand side by side.

We can lay down that the Biblical witness does not say one thing in one way, but in many ways, not one line only, but on several converging lines, and therefore not without difference or contrast, but yet without contradiction. It is on the 'without contradiction' that we must insist.¹³³

Barth's treatment distinguishes Christian theology from natural theology. The two are antithetical. Only the former is worthy of consideration. One last quotation before we bring the section to a close.

We may conclude, therefore, that Holy Scripture neither imposes the necessity nor even offers the possibility of reckoning with a knowability of the God of the prophets and apostles which is not given in and with His revelation, or bound to it; and therefore to the extent with a 'Christian' natural theology. Holy Scripture does not present us with 'another' task of theology, nor are we allowed to impose it upon ourselves. Holy Scripture neither urges us nor even authorises us to look around for a readiness of God for man which is different from His readiness in the grace of His Word and Spirit.¹³⁴

Barth's exegesis of the above passages of scripture is rather forced. He has made up his mind about the matter and appears here to have brought his assumptions to his exegesis and interpretation. Though his offensive against natural theology is understandable, he has overreacted and therefore overstated his thesis. As such he fell into the very trap that he has so conscientiously cautioned theologians against. He has forced his theology of revelation into a Procrustean bed the result of which is not only

¹³² *CD* II/1, 109.

¹³³ *CD* II/1, 106.

¹³⁴ *CD* II/1, 125.

the wholesale rejection of natural theology but also the marginalisation of the revelation of God in creation. We shall return to this very important question of general revelation and the natural knowledge of God at a later stage of this study. But first we must subject Barth's theology of revelation to closer examination.

CHAPTER V

THE REVELATION OF GOD

1. Introduction: Revelation and the Trinity

In the previous chapter we examined the basic presuppositions that underlined Barth's theory of the knowledge of God. The fundamental assertion made by Barth in this regard is that 'God can only be known by God'. Barth's theology of revelation, as we shall see, is developed on this basis. It is for this reason that Barth places the Trinity at the forefront of his *Church Dogmatics*.¹ Though this approach has its precedence in theologians like Peter Lombard of the Middle Ages, it is nevertheless uncommon. The Reformers, and the ensuing confessions in the post-reformation age began customarily with the doctrine of scripture, although there have been some who have chosen the doctrine of God as a starting point. Though Barth recognises the fact that he is adopting a very isolated position from the standpoint of dogmatic history,² his revelatory realism and his theological epistemology led him to conclude that the concept of the Trinity should come first. The Trinity is primary for Barth because it

¹ This basic orientation in Barth's thought began very early in his theological development. Its genesis can be traced back to his *Göttingen Dogmatics*, first published in 1927. This orientation can perhaps be attributed to his response to Schleiermacher. Cf., *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 96f.

² 'The reason for this strange circumstance can be sought only in the fact that with overwhelming unanimity it has obviously been thought that a certain formally very natural and illuminating scheme of questioning should be followed in which one can and should speak first of Holy Scripture (or in Roman Catholic dogmatics the authority of the teaching office, or in Modernist dogmatics the reality and truth of religion as the *principium cognoscendi* (apart from the actual content of faith), and then that even in the doctrine of God itself one can and should deal first with God's existence, nature and attributes (again apart from the concrete givenness of what Christians call "God").' *CD I/1*, 300.

is a distinctively Christian idea of God which is found in his unique and ultimate self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. He writes, '[t]he doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation'.³ Like Barth, Balthasar has also given central place to the Trinity. His theological aesthetics can be said to bear similar traits to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in the sense that like Barth, Balthasar accords a definitive role for the Trinity in his theological thinking as a whole. Werner Löser is therefore right in saying that Balthasar's 'whole theology has trinitarian contours'.⁴

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail Barth's doctrine of the Trinity, two important aspects of that doctrine must be highlighted here to prepare the ground for our discussion of Barth's theology of revelation. Firstly, what God is in himself is known from what God is and does in his revelation. That is to say, the immanent Trinity, what God is in himself, is known through the economic Trinity, what God is in the economy of salvation in the world for mankind.⁵ Secondly, in the perichoretic relationship within the Godhead, Father Son, and Spirit cohere and interpenetrate one another so that though these three 'persons' are distinct, God himself is not divided. When God acts *ad extra*, towards us, his acts

³ CD I/1, 301.

⁴ 'Trinitätstheologies Heute, Ansatz und Entwürfe', *Trinitat*, Aktuelle Perspektiven der Theologie, Wilhelm Breuning (ed.), Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 1984, 39. Cited by J. Thompson, 'Barth and Balthasar: An Ecumenical Dialogue', *The Beauty of Christ*, 182.

⁵ CD I/1, 332 & 479.

are one and indivisible: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.⁶ There can therefore be only one revelation though there are three aspects of it: God the Father is the Revealer (*der Offenbarer*), God the Son the revelation (*der Offenbarung*), and God the Holy Spirit the revealedness (*der Offenbasein*). This, Barth maintains, will make it clear to us 'that and to what extent we are led by revelation itself to the problem of the three-in-oneness'.⁷ John Thompson explains.

The revelation in Jesus Christ is of one who is Lord, who is God; and this points to a Revealer who is the same Lord, the same God, the same subject of revelation. It points also to the one who might in one sense be called the person who completes revelation, brings revelation to humanity, involves us in it. This third aspect is God again in another form, the same God, the same Lord; thus we have God as the revealer, the revelation, and this reaching out to and involving humanity, himself from himself not as another God, but as three ways in which the one God exists, comes to us, is known by us and experienced.⁸

2. Jesus Christ the Objective Revelation of God

a. General Perspectives on Barth's Christology⁹

⁶ See John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 21.

⁷ *CD* I/1, 539.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ There has been some discussion about whether Barth is Antiochian or Alexandrian (see, for example, Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* [Amsterdam: Mouton, 1984]). It seems to us that any attempt to determine that Barth's Christology is either Antiochian or Alexandrian would almost inevitably end up with statements that do not seem to square with the mainline of his thinking. We agree with Hans Boersma's observation that with a synthesis of both views the difficulty disappears. 'Jesus Christ is God by nature as the second mode of being in the Trinity. This being is at the same time God's act. Being is becoming. Therefore, Christ's direct identity is at the same time indirect identity. The "static" doctrine of both the Alexandrian and the Antiochian traditions are overcome in the Word of God where being and becoming are identical. The Christ is by nature the Son of God but also becomes the Son of God by association through God's act'. Cf. 'Alexandrian or Antiochian? A Dilemma in Barth's Christology',

There can be no doubt that Karl Barth accords Christology the central place in his theology. Barth himself wrote that 'a church dogmatics must ... be Christologically determined as a whole and in all parts, as surely as the revealed Word of God attested to by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only true criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with Jesus Christ'. 'If dogmatics cannot regard itself and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christology', he argues, 'it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as church dogmatics'.¹⁰ Hartwell pointed out that the Christological concentration not only in the *Church Dogmatics*, but indeed in the whole of Barth's theology is 'unparalleled in the history of Christian thought'.¹¹

Christological thinking, for Barth, *per definitionem*, forms the very basis for all theological thinking. If our Christian knowledge of God arises from his self revelation in Jesus Christ, Christian theology, as T. F. Torrance argues, 'involves a knowledge which is determined and controlled in its content by what is given in Jesus Christ, and operates with a mode of rational activity which corresponds to the nature of the object of this knowledge in Jesus Christ'.¹² Christology is the decisive word that must be spoken,¹³ for without it theology will cease to be Christian.¹⁴

Westminster Theological Journal, 52 (1990), 270.

¹⁰ CD I/2, 123.

¹¹ *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*, 15-16.

¹² 'The Place of Christology in Biblical and Dogmatic Theology', in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, T. H. L. Parker (ed.,) (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 13.

¹³ CD IV/2, 79.

¹⁴ CD II/1, 320.

But does not this Christological concentration run the danger of very quickly becoming 'Christomonism', where there can be no theology except Christology. Indeed Barth has been criticised for this on all sides.¹⁵ However, we are in agreement with John Thompson who maintains that Barth never intended to use Christology as a abstract principle with which to do theology. He was simply dealing with the living reality of Jesus Christ as God's supreme revelation.¹⁶ In the same way Berkouwer's thesis that Barth's theology is motivated by the 'grace' principle is untenable.¹⁷ Barth's answer to Berkouwer will shed light on his understanding of the function of Christology in dogmatics. Clarifying what he means by 'christological' thinking, Barth wrote

... I maintain that for me thinking is christological only when it consists in the perception, comprehension, understanding and estimation of the reality of the living person of Jesus Christ as attested by Holy Scripture, in attentiveness to the range and significance of His existence, in openness to His self-disclosure, in consistency in following Him as is demanded ... I underline, however that we are not dealing with a Christ-principle, but with Jesus Christ Himself as attested by Holy Scripture.¹⁸

Two aspects of Barth's treatment of Christology vindicate him from the above

¹⁵ See discussion in G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955); Colin Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London, 1967); John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London: OUP, 1962) and *KB*. In response to the latter's critique Barth wrote: 'I now have an inkling of something which at first I could not understand: what is meant by the "christological constriction" which my expositor and critic urges me in terms of mild rebuke. But we must bring against him the counter-question, whether in all the spiritual splendour of the saints who are supposed to represent and repeat Him Jesus Christ has not ceased - not in theory but in practice - to be the object and origin of Christian faith'. *CD* IV/1, 768.

¹⁶ John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective* (edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1978), 5.

¹⁷ Cf., *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

¹⁸ *CD* IV/3, 174. For the whole discussion, see *CD* IV/3, 173-185.

allegation of Christomonism. The first is Barth's reference to history. Jesus Christ as man exists as a single member 'in the natural and historical nexus of the created world'.¹⁹ The second is to be found in Barth's insistence on a definite Christology as the articulation of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.²⁰ We therefore agree with E. W. Wendebourg's assessment of Barth's Christocentric theology:

The whole of the Church Dogmatics, the further one goes into it, is an attempt to illumine the centre of the Holy Scripture and of all true Christian preaching, viz, the person and work of Jesus Christ and to let this centre be perceptible and relevant in every dimension of Christian theological thinking.

We are also in agreement with his insight that 'the way of evangelical theology will only be full of promise if it does not fall back again behind the *solus Christus* which Barth demands'.²¹

b. Jesus Christ as the Revelation of God

Mackintosh wrote that according to Barth, 'revelation, in essence, is an event which has taken place in Jesus Christ and still takes place in Him ...'²² The proper approach to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is to put the question of the fact of revelation before the question of interpretation. Hence the reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ must first be considered before the question of its possibility can be

¹⁹ CD IV/3, 39. See also CD IV/1, 16, 158.

²⁰ CD I/2, 123-124.

²¹ Quoted by John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 7, fn. 50.

²² *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Collins, 1964), 264.

properly raised and investigated.²³ The New Testament, Barth asserts, is from beginning to end, constantly appealing to the name of Jesus Christ: 'The content of the New Testament is solely the name of Jesus Christ, which, of course, also and above all involves the truth of His God-Manhood. Quite by itself this name signifies the objective reality of revelation'.²⁴

Barth's polemic here is obvious. He is voicing his trenchant opposition to all forms of anthropocentric theology which assumes that it 'could interpret the reality revealed in Jesus Christ simply as the revelation of the deepest and final reality of man'.²⁵ All forms of docetism must be avoided in our theological perception.

The ascertaining of the first fact, that the Son of God is this man, that the Christ is Jesus, is not to be conceived of as though those who thought and spoke had first a definite conception of God or of a Son or Word of God, of a Christ, and then found this conception confirmed and fulfilled in Jesus. This would be an arbitrary christology, docetic in its estimate and in its conclusions, on the basis of which there can be no serious recognition of the divinity of Christ.²⁶

Ebionitism is also to be avoided, because here too is the serious recognition of the divinity of Christ impossible.²⁷ But can there not be a synthesis of the two?

²³ Barth is in this instance weary of the trappings of modern Protestantism: 'In the Protestant theology that has prevailed since about 1700, it has actually become a fundamental presupposition. The basic difference between this and the theology of older Protestantism is that from some source or other, some general knowledge of God and man, it is known beforehand, known *a priori*, what revelation must be, may be, and ought to be'. *CD* I/2, 4. Barth explains that this is the mistake committed by Lessing, Kant and Schleiermacher.

²⁴ *CD* I/2, 15.

²⁵ *CD* I/2, 12.

²⁶ *CD* I/2, 16.

²⁷ Barth's incisive comment cuts at the very heart of the modern Christological controversy: 'As docetism starts from a human conception to which it logically returns in the course, so does Ebionitism start from a human experience and impression of

Barth answers this question with an emphatic 'No!'

... that God's Son or Word is the man Jesus of Nazareth is the one Christological thesis of the New Testament ... In the variety of their language about the reality of revelation, when they call the true God man and the true man God, they are uttering only their penultimate word, not their ultimate. When they are uttering their ultimate word, they say the same thing. This ultimate word, however, is not a further thesis, not a synthesis, but just the name Jesus Christ. By naming Him, they want to let Him who is so named have the final word.²⁸

Barth is concerned here, as he is throughout his *Church Dogmatics*, to stress the point that we can derive the concept of the Son or the Word of God from no other source than Jesus Christ Himself, the Word of God made flesh.

c. *The Incarnation of the Word*

Barth's discussion on the 'Problem of Christology' in *CD I/2* is crucial for understanding the place and function of the Incarnation. His argument can be summarised as follows. Firstly, in trying to understand God's revelation, we cannot go beyond or behind the objective reality of the Incarnation: 'Our first crucial statement, "that the eternal Word of God chose, sanctified and assumed human nature and existence into oneness with Himself, in order thus, as very God and very man, to become the Word of reconciliation spoken to man", signifies the mystery of the revelation in Jesus Christ. That is to say, in this statement we describe absolutely the sole point from which a doctrine of revelation congruous with this witness can originate'.²⁹ Because the Incarnation is absolutely the sole point from which the

the heroic personality of Jesus of Nazareth. On the basis of this impression and experience, divinity is ascribed to this man'. *CD I/2*, 20.

²⁸ *CD I/2*, 23-4.

²⁹ *CD I/2*, 124.

doctrine of revelation must originate, we must not look for some higher vantage point. Neither can we 'derive or prove the statement in which this point is to be described, from a higher discernment'. All we can do is to describe it as a starting point.

Secondly, it cannot be transformed into a non-mystery.³⁰ As a starting point it must be described again and again as a mystery. It is not something discoverable by man through the use of his own powers or through his observation of the cosmos. 'At all costs we must make it clear that an ultimate mystery is involved here'. His next statement presses the point still further: 'It can be contemplated, acknowledged, worshipped and confessed as such, but it cannot be solved, or transformed into a non-mystery. Upon no consideration must it be treated in such a way that the mystery is resolved away'.³¹ It is in this very area that modern Christology has committed its most serious error. By trivialising or even forgetting the mystery, it has blinded itself to the objective reality of God's revelation and created a situation in which any understanding and discussion has become impossible.

Thirdly, we must be aware and constantly remind ourselves of the limits, goals and boundaries of Christology.

³⁰ Barth is very much beholden to the wisdom of primitive Christology of Chalcedon for not attempting to solve the mystery and turning the Incarnation into a non-mystery. 'It began and ended with the realisation that this was simply impossible'. Concerning the charge of 'intellectualism' that modern theology brought to primitive Christology, Barth wrote, 'We have, then no cause to give ear to the charge of intellectualism urged against primitive Christology. In its formal as in its material shape its root and upshot are the same, a half-bold, half-puzzled failure to see what the New Testament actually says and what is actually heard in the Church and by the Church. Whatever may be alleged against primitive Christology, it was not guilty of this failure, and therefore, in spite of the reproach in question, at every decisive point we have good reason to take our stand on its side and not on that of the accusers'. Cf., *CD I/2*, 126-131.

³¹ *CD I/2*, 124-125.

In Christology the limits as well as the goal must be fixed as they are seen to be fixed already in the Evangelists and apostles themselves, i.e., the goal of thought and language must be determined entirely by the unique object in question. But this same object in its uniqueness must also signify for us the boundary beyond which we are not to think and speak. Christology has to consider and to state who Jesus Christ is, who in revelation exercises God's power over man. But it must avoid doing so in such a way as to presuppose that man may now exercise a power over God.³²

The central statement about God's revelation in Jesus Christ is this: 'The Word was made flesh'. It is this statement that must guide our reflections on the dogmatic statement of Christology, that Jesus Christ is very God and very man. For Barth, the 'Word' spoken of in John 1:14 is indeed the 'divine, creative, reconciling, redeeming Word which participates without restriction in the divine nature and existence, the eternal Son of God'.³³ The Word is identified with Jesus Christ. It is this Logos Who was made flesh and who has proclaimed the invisible God. Indeed only the Logos can proclaim him 'because He is Himself the only begotten, in the bosom of the Father'.³⁴ Barth goes on to make several important statements about the Incarnate Word.

1. In becoming flesh the Word remains who he is, the true and eternal God. The kenosis implies no loss in divine majesty, but, when considered in the light of the goal of the Incarnation, its triumph.³⁵ The Word remains wholly the Divine Subject. Schleiermacher's notion that the appearance of Jesus Christ signals that 'the creation of human nature is now completed for the first time' is rejected. The Incarnation for

³² CD I/2, 125.

³³ CD I/2, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ CD I/2, 37. See also CD IV/2, 157ff.

Barth is not 'the movement of the creature's own. Like creation itself, it is a sovereign divine act, and is not an act of lordship different from creation'.³⁶

2. The Incarnation took place in the divine freedom of the Word. The Incarnation is not a determination immanent in the cosmos or in man.³⁷ Even sin and the impending destruction of the whole of creation cannot be said to have necessitated it.³⁸ 'If He has actually done this, we have to recognise His free goodwill in so doing and nothing else ... so we say that when the Word becomes flesh, we are concerned with a miracle, an act of God's mercy'.³⁹

3. In this state of becoming and having become flesh, the Word remains the free, sovereign Word of God. In the incarnation, therefore, it is the Word who speaks, acts and reveals. 'The Word is what He is even before and apart from His being flesh'. Hence the equation 'very God and very man' is irreversible. The Word is not dependent on the flesh. Rather the reverse is true: '... flesh not only could not be flesh apart from the Word, but apart from the Word it would have no being at all ...'.⁴⁰ To speak of the flesh becoming the Word is impossible and blasphemous.⁴¹

The Incarnation means that God has chosen a modality in which to meet man in his revelation. The Word became 'flesh' means that the Word became true man,

³⁶ *CD* I/2, 134.

³⁷ *CD* I/2, 135-137; IV/2, 45. Cf., IV/2, 37.

³⁸ Contra Athanasius and Anselm.

³⁹ *CD* I/2, 135-136.

⁴⁰ *CD* I/2, 136.

⁴¹ Barth rejects the 'Jesus of history' movement and the Roman Catholic devotion to Jesus and the teaching of the sacred heart of Jesus. See *CD* I/2, 136-137 and J. Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 147, fn. 50.

the object and theatre of God's action. Through the incarnation the Son has assumed our *humanitas*, and in so doing he became one particular man.⁴² But why this particular modality? This is so because of its objectivity. But we also realise that this objectivity is a veiled objectivity. For 'there is nothing stranger, nothing more puzzling to a man than a fellowman'.⁴³ This modality therefore becomes most fitting for the revelation of God: 'The encounter with man who is flesh is the encounter by which we exist. And in that case we will understand that this existence can cover up and conceal something, make a mystery of it, as nothing else in the world can. It may therefore become the means of divine revelation which is always a veiling as such'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Barth argues, 'there is nothing nearer or more familiar to man than just man. Nothing else comes closer to us, is so constitutive for ourselves, as the other man in all his strangeness and obscurity'.⁴⁵ Thus if there is to be a revelation,

⁴² Barth considers the idea that God assumed our humanity without in fact being one particular man to be impossible. Barth's interpretation of the traditional doctrine of the *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* can be gleaned from the following comment by T. F. Torrance: 'By *anhypostasia* classical Christology asserted that in the *assumptio carnis* the human nature of Christ had no independent *per se* subsistence apart from the event of the incarnation, apart from the hypostatic union. By *enhypostasia*, however, it asserted that in the *assumptio carnis* the human nature of Christ was a real and concrete subsistence within the hypostatic union - it was *enhypostasis* in the Word. *Anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis* are inseparable. In the Incarnation the eternal Son assumed human nature into oneness with himself but in that assumption Jesus Christ is not only real man but a man'. Quoted in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, T.H.L. Parker (ed.) (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 16. *Anhypostasis* then asserts the negative, while *enhypostasis* asserts the positive. Barth writes: '... from the utter uniqueness of this unity follows the statement, that God and Man are so related in Jesus Christ, that He exists as Man so far and only so far as He exists as God, i.e., in the mode of existence of the eternal Word of God'. *CD I/2*, 163.

⁴³ *CD I/2*, 41.

⁴⁴ *CD I/2*, 42.

⁴⁵ *CD I/2*, 42.

‘where else will it announce itself than as it does, in the same neighbour, who can stand for us as the essence of objectivity?’⁴⁶

The above statement, however, raises a very important question: Is the *humanitas Christi* as such the revelation of God? To this question Barth gives the reply that since it conceals as well as reveals, the *humanitas Christi* is only indirectly the revelation of God: ‘... the power and continuity in which the man Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the revealed Word according to the witness of the Evangelists and apostles consists here too in the power and continuity of the divine action in this form and not in the continuity of this form as such’.⁴⁷ Here we see a sacramental understanding of the *humanitas Christi*. Barth argues that Jesus Christ did not become a revelation to all who met him, but only a few. He postulates from this that the revealing itself cannot be ascribed to the existence of Jesus Christ: ‘... the Godhead is not so immanent in Christ’s humanity that it does not also remain transcendent to it, that its immanence ceases to be an event in the Old Testament sense, always a new thing, something that God actually brings into being in specific circumstances’.⁴⁸ In this way Barth hopes to maintain his doctrine that God is and remains the Subject of his self-revelation in Jesus Christ; he is *Deus absconditus* as well as *Deus revelatus*. We have then, before us, the *raison d’être* for the Incarnation:

If God’s revelation is the way from veiling of the eternal Word to His unveiling, from crib and cross to resurrection and ascension, how can it possibly be anything else than God’s becoming man, His becoming flesh? As the Incarnation of the Word it can be revelation. To be revelation it had to be an Incarnation. Incarnation was needed in order

⁴⁶ CD I/2, 43.

⁴⁷ CD I/1, 323.

⁴⁸ CD I/2, 323.

that God might become manifest to us, that He might be free for us.⁴⁹

d. *Jesus Christ, The Truth of God and Other Truths*

In a lengthy section in *CD IV/3.1* Barth discusses the relationship between Jesus Christ who is the Light of life and the truth of God with the other truths in the world. Space does not permit us to trace all of Barth's arguments closely. We shall attempt, in this sub-section, to highlight the salient points of his argument, especially those aspects that have direct bearing on the concept of general revelation.

Jesus Christ radiates the light of life because he is the light of the world. He shines not with an alien light that falls as it were from without. Rather he is illumined by his own light that proceeds from himself: 'He does not need to receive light from without, from men, the world, or the faith of his community. On the contrary, as He lives, He is the light which shines on men, and men to themselves and also the world of men'.⁵⁰ The careful reader will immediately notice how close Balthasar's own understanding of the *Gestalt* of Christ is to Barth's here.

The life of Christ is light because in it we are dealing 'not with an indeterminate happening, but with the very presence and action of God'. It is because of God's presence and action that we can say that the life of Christ is light, truth, revelation, Word and glory.⁵¹ The life of Jesus Christ, then, in its fullest sense, is

⁴⁹ *CD I/2*, 42.

⁵⁰ *CD IV/3.1*, 46.

⁵¹ *CD IV/3.1.79*.

the declaration of God's glory.⁵² The true and living God is both eloquent and radiant; and this is not only so in creation, time and history. He is eloquent and radiant in all eternity because He is not only Father, 'but also the eternal Word as the Son of the Father, and that in the Son He has the reflection of His own glory'.⁵³ Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God is therefore the total and complete declaration of God concerning Himself: 'What [God] is for us and wills for us, but also what we are for Him and are ordained to be and will and do in this relationship, is exhaustively, unreservedly and totally revealed to us in Jesus Christ as the one Word of God'.⁵⁴ By saying that Jesus Christ is the Light of life, Barth means that He is the one and only light of life in all its fullness, in perfect adequacy; and negatively, it means that there is no other light of life outside or alongside His, outside or alongside the light which He is'.⁵⁵

Having said the above however, Barth does concede to the fact that there are other words, lights and even revelations.

We recognise that the fact that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God does not mean that in the Bible, the Church and the world there are not other words which are quite notable in their way, other lights which

⁵² Here again both Balthasar and Barth share the same view regarding the significance of the concept of glory in the Bible. Barth could write that '[I]n the Bible, glory ... is a characteristic, indeed, it is the supreme characteristic, of divine being and action, and it finds its reflection and response in the creaturely sphere of the glorifying ... of God which is proper to man'. *CD IV/3.1*, 47.

⁵³ *CD IV/3.1*, 80.

⁵⁴ *CD IV/3.1*, 99. Thus Jesus Christ is profoundly the glory of God and the glorification of man: 'The glory of Jesus Christ embraces both the *gloria* of God and the human *glorificatio* which it deserves and exacts ... It is the glory of God who humbles Himself to man, and also of the man exalted to God. It is the glory of the Lord who is Servant and the Servant who is Lord'. *CD IV/3.1*, 48.

⁵⁵ *CD IV/3.1*, 86.

are quite clear and other revelations⁵ which are quite real ... Nor does it follow from our statement that every word spoken outside the circle of the Bible and the Church is a word of false prophecy and therefore valueless, empty and corrupt, that all the lights which rise and shine in this outer sphere are misleading and all the revelations are necessarily untrue. Our statement is simply to the effect that Jesus Christ is the one and only Word of God, that He alone is the light of God and the revelation of God.⁵⁶

The question that now arises is how do these other words and truths relate to the one Word and Truth of God in Jesus Christ. As far as the words of the Bible and the Church are concerned, Barth argues that they are wholly dependent on how far they (a) coincide and agree with the Word spoke in Jesus Christ, (b) attest to this one Word, and (c) are commissioned to attest, reflect and reproduce the Word spoken in Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ Concerning the words that are found outside the Church, Barth maintains that though the Church cannot close her ears to them, they must be tested by the witness of Scripture.⁵⁸

Creation, as the location and setting of the mediation of the life and work of the Incarnate Word, is, for Barth, as it is for Calvin, the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, 'the external basis of the covenant which conversely is its internal basis'.⁵⁹ The creaturely world, the cosmos, has its 'own lights and truths and therefore its own speech and

⁵⁶ CD IV/3.1, 97.

⁵⁷ CD IV/3.1, 114.

⁵⁸ 'Words of this kind cannot be such as overlook or even lead away from the Bible. They can only be those which, in material agreement with it, illumine, accentuate or explain the biblical witness in a particular time and situation, thus confirming it in the deepest sense by helping to make it sure and concretely evident and certain. They can only be words which will lead the community more truly and profoundly than every to scripture'. CD IV/3.1, 115.

⁵⁹ CD IV/3.1, 137.

words'.⁶⁰ These may be perceived, heard and considered. They have been used in the service of the self-attestation of God, but they must be distinguished from God's revelation. Indeed Barth cautions against speaking of the luminosity of the world as 'lights' and 'revelation'. He warns his readers of the dangers of the modern expressions like the 'revelation of creation' or 'primal revelation' as these terms 'might be given a clear and unequivocal sense in this respect which they do not have in common parlance'.⁶¹

The above statements seem to suggest that Barth has totally rejected the traditional doctrine of general revelation. Indeed many have accused Barth of this, and of wrapping his concept of revelation in the strait-jacket of Christo-monism. But is this a fair criticism of Barth? We think not. To be sure Barth makes it absolutely clear that though creaturely existence has its own lights and truths, they do not point beyond themselves to the transcendent being of God.⁶² But Barth could also speak of the self-witness of creation speaking 'as from God Himself, praising and glorifying Him: "the heavens declare the Glory of God; the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19.1)'.⁶³ But the important qualification for Barth is that they do this not out of

⁶⁰ CD IV/3.1, 139.

⁶¹ CD IV/3.1, 140.

⁶² Barth is emphatic about this because any weakening of this emphasis could mean that theology will once again slip into the grips of an analogy of being. With force and clarity, Barth stresses that these truths 'tell us nothing concerning God the Creator and Lord, nor concerning man in his relationship to God. For the Word of God, the revelation of the truth of God and man, is not pronounced by them. Primary and ultimate questions are neither raised or answered by them' (CD IV/3.1, 147) and that these truths are 'its own revelations', that is to say, the revelations of the *creatura* itself. CD IV/3.1, 140.

⁶³ CD IV/3.1, 134.

their own power. Hence, '[t]here is no speech nor language'. They acquire this power from God who instituted, installed and ordained them to the *ministerium Verbi Divini*. In other words, God uses the objectivity of the world to objectify Himself, to reveal Himself. The world in and by itself, with its own revelations and truths, is unable to point beyond itself to God. God in his goodwill, freedom and sovereignty uses the creaturely world to perform this service. The positivity of the world is affirmed, and the concept of God's revelation in and through the world and its place and function in the whole reality of God's revelation is developed, albeit very cautiously.

3. The Holy Spirit, the Subjective Reality of Revelation

a. *The Subjective Reality of Revelation*

Barth's understanding of the place and function of the Holy Spirit in the revelation of God is summarised in a single pregnant sentence: 'The one true God and Lord Himself in the "person" of the Holy Spirit, is His own state of revealedness for us'.⁶⁴ Barth's approach here is consistent. He is concerned first to investigate the

⁶⁴ CD I/2, 204. Rosato's thesis that Barth's pneumatology acts as a kind of counter to Schleiermacher's 'theology of experience' is both interesting and tenable. There can be no doubt that the former is both influenced by, and is reacting to the latter. Of Schleiermacher's idealistic methodology and mediating principle Barth thought to be wholly inadequate. To be sure, the place that Barth accords to pneumatology in his exposition of the Christian life (and in the subjective reality of revelation in the Christian) can be seen as a redress to the reductionisms of the theology of Schleiermacher and that of 19th century Protestantism. Thus Rosato is perhaps right when he asserted that 'Barth's expressly pneumatological reinterpretation of these theologies leads him to conclude that the validity of their latent intention is irreparably compromised by their particular anthropological blurring of God's Spirit and man's spirit; such an identity causes anthropology to absorb christology into itself'. *The Spirit as Lord. The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 15. But Rosato's thesis turned awry when he insisted that Barth, in his reaction to the above theologies, 'gradually became more properly a pneumatocentric than christocentric theologian' (*Ibid.*, 3). See J. Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Pennsylvania: Pickwick, 1991), Chapter 11, for a rebuttal of the above

question of the reality of the phenomenon before considering its possibility. The second question, though equally important, must be raised only as a *secundum ordinem*. Only in this way, Barth asserts, can true objectivity to the revelation of God be achieved. 'Certainty of faith, i.e., a grounded awareness that God's revelation reaches man and how it does so, has first to be regarded simply in its reality, and only then, and on that basis, in its possibility, and in the various conditions of that possibility. Even in theology we can end in certainty of faith only if we have already started in certainty of faith'.⁶⁵

For Barth the reality of God's revealedness for man includes man's corresponding response and the fact that this response has been made.

The existence of men who render faith and obedience to the Word of God; the fact that there is such a thing among men as faith and obedience to the Word of God; the entire correspondence on man's side to the divine act of revelation: all this is just as seriously the context of biblical witness to revelation as is the objective reality of revelation, i.e., Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God.⁶⁶

Revelation cannot be understood in a general way as though it were the eternal definition and eternal meaning of all time. Revelation has its own time and comes to a certain group of people in history.⁶⁷ In other words, revelation can only be

view.

⁶⁵ CD I/2, 206. Here, as in many other aspects of Barth's theology, we can detect the strong influence of Anselm. We shall be looking at this in greater detail in the next chapter. For our present purposes it is sufficient to highlight Barth's application of the Anselmian principle that the subjective knowledge of the believer corresponds to the ontic rationality and necessity which is prior to it. See John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 6; Philip Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 61; and G. Watson, 'A Study of St. Anselm's Soteriology and Karl Barth's Theological Method', *SJT*, 42 (4), 1989, 493-513.

⁶⁶ CD I/2, 206.

⁶⁷ CD I/2, 209-10.

revelation *in concreto*. All these other aspects, for example, man's response to revelation, 'constitute an integral part of the biblical testimony to revelation and of revelation itself, and that part belongs directly and indispensably to the substance of the record'.⁶⁸ The Word of God attested to in scriptures has to do not only with God but with man as well, namely, biblical man who is confronted by the revelation of God.

It is for the above reasons that ecclesiology looms so largely in Barth's explication of the subjective reality of revelation. Of course, when Barth speaks of the Church, he is not referring to an arbitrary construction which is formed by individuals according to their own ability and insight. He is speaking of the Church of Christ, that is, a community whose existence is utterly dependent on Christ. Only in such a community can the saying *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* hold true. 'The significance of the Church for the subjective reality of revelation', Barth emphasises, 'is not a Roman Catholic but a biblical and therefore of necessity a universally Christian doctrine'.⁶⁹ In a long historical study Barth discusses numerous theologians of the past, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Luther and Calvin, to substantiate his point. Perhaps a quotation from Luther here would suffice to help us to understand Barth's fundamental impulse: 'Therefore whoso would find Christ must first find the Churches. How would we know where Christ and His faith were, if we wot not where His faithful are? And whoso would know somewhat of Christ must not trust himself nor build a bridge to heaven by his own understanding, but go to the Churches, visit and question the same. For outwith the Christian Church is no truth,

⁶⁸ CD I/2, 207.

⁶⁹ CD I/2, 211.

no Christ, no blessedness'.⁷⁰

The place and function of the Holy Spirit is thus to direct and integrate men (ecclesial man, the Christian) into the objective revelation in Jesus Christ. In so doing, the Holy Spirit reveals Himself as the subjective reality and possibility of the revelation of God.

The God who acts here and now does so in a way different from His eternal action or His action then and there in Jesus Christ. But, since God acting on Christians here and now brings them to faith in Jesus Christ and to the community of Jesus Christ, this faith and this community is the aim of God's self-impartation. This new and specific, this inviting and challenging, self-impartation and faith bringing act of God in their regard is oriented towards making what has been objectively revealed a subjective reality.⁷¹

In the final section of this chapter, we shall examine, albeit very briefly, other aspects of Barth's ecclesiology which demonstrate the place of the Church in Barth's theological epistemology. For the moment, we must turn our attention to another aspect of the subjective work of the Spirit in our knowledge of God.

b. *The Subjective Possibility of Revelation*

Barth considers the Holy Spirit as the subjective possibility of revelation under three statements or propositions, and it is to them that we must now turn our attention. The question that Barth hopes to answer here is, 'How in the freedom of man is it possible for God's revelation to reach him? To what extent is the work of the Holy Spirit the reality of revelation, i.e., the adequate ground for man's freedom

⁷⁰ CD I/2, 213.

⁷¹ Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 52.

for God, and therefore of his receiving what God offers him?'⁷²

The first proposition is this: 'By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible for God's revelation to reach man in his freedom, because in it the Word of God is brought to his hearing'.⁷³ This corresponds with Barth's trinitarian theology - the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son; he is the Spirit of the Father who has revealed himself through the Son. For Barth, the revelation of the Word is insufficient for the accomplishment of the purposes of God. The Word must become accessible to man. This impartation of the Word to man is effected by the work of the Holy Spirit. Inseparably linked to the Word, the Holy Spirit is the power of God which draws men to it.⁷⁴

It is important for us to understand the place of pneumatology in Barth's essentially christologically centred notion of revelation. Here three pertinent points may be made: Firstly, the Holy Spirit, as it were, completes the process of revelation. He fulfils the epistemic dimension by ensuring that the ontic in Jesus Christ becomes noetic in man. 'To achieve this end, God first makes his own readiness for man an object capable of being known by man the subject. This is the objective grace in Jesus Christ, the person in whom God makes himself present in history. Secondly, God makes Jesus Christ, who is his own self-knowledge, accessible to man through his

⁷² *CD* I/2, 243.

⁷³ *CD* I/2, 246.

⁷⁴ 'The reason, and the only reason, why man can receive revelation in the Holy Spirit is that God's Word is brought to his hearing in the Holy Spirit' (*CD* I/2, 246). 'Moreover, the Holy Spirit (at least according to the Western notion of the Trinity of God) is inseparable from the Word and his power, therefore, not a power separate from the Word, but the power that lives in the Word and through the Word' (*CD* I.1, 171).

Holy Spirit, his own knowability'.⁷⁵ The Holy Spirit, who is God's own historical self-impartation to man, ensures that the knowledge of God by man through revelation is in correspondence with God in himself. As the Spirit of Truth and the spiritual power of God's eternal Word, the Holy Spirit can create a human knowledge that corresponds to the truth of God himself. This knowledge of faith is the miracle of grace through the Spirit. And thirdly, the Holy Spirit draws men into a new relationship with the triune God. Through the experience of faith, the Holy Spirit actually incorporates man into revelation. 'It is Christ, the Word of God, brought to the hearing of man by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who is man's possibility of being the recipient of divine revelation. Therefore this receiving, this revealedness of God for us, is really itself revelation. In no less a sense than the Incarnation of the Word in Christ, it is the divine act of lordship, the mystery and the miracle of the existence of God among us, the triumph of grace'.⁷⁶

The second proposition reads as follows: 'By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible in the freedom of man for God's revelation to meet him, because in it he is explicitly told by God's Word that he possesses one possibility of his own for such a meeting'.⁷⁷ Man is not actually free for God. 'It is not merely that man lacks something which he ought to be or have to be capable of in relation to God. He lacks everything. It is not merely that he is in dangerous and damaged state, but in his being toward God he is completely finished and impotent. He is not only a sick man

⁷⁵ Rosato, *Spirit as Lord*, 73.

⁷⁶ CD I/2, 249.

⁷⁷ CD I/2, 257.

but a dead one'.⁷⁸ We hear the Word of God not by our own possibilities, but the freedom of the Word itself. Therefore the fact that man does hear the Word of God shows clearly that this occurrence is a miracle.⁷⁹

And finally, the third proposition: 'By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible for man in his freedom to be met by God's revelation, because in it the Word of God becomes unavoidably his Master'.⁸⁰ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as we have already seen, brings man into a relationship with the Triune God. In this relationship, the Word of God is exalted by the Spirit to be Master over men.⁸¹ Barth goes on to explain what this means, and what it entails. To have our master in Jesus Christ means that we always have him over and above us. Barth uses Psalm 139:1-10 to explain divine omnipresence from which we can no longer withdraw. We are in a position where we have discovered the supreme authority of Jesus Christ under which we are always responsible and subject. The Word of God, which strikes us at our very being brings us to an awareness that we are subject to a command in face of which 'there can be neither subterfuge nor excuse', since, as children of God we can only hear in obedience; that is to say, a hearing that is also the doing of the Word.⁸² To have our master in Jesus Christ also means that we exist

⁷⁸ *CD I/2*, 257.

⁷⁹ 'It is a state or position in which man may very well find himself, but only with amazement, only with the gratitude, only in humble recognition of an accomplished fact, without any opportunity to think how it might come to pass, without possessing any need or capacity to derive it from his earlier state or to indicate the way which led from the one to another' (*CD I/2*, 260).

⁸⁰ *CD I/2*, 265.

⁸¹ *CD I/2*, 270.

⁸² *CD I/2*, 272-274.

in 'an ultimate and most profound irresponsibility'.⁸³ By this Barth means simply that the Word of God does not impose upon us a new responsibility but merely claims our response, our will and action. These are claimed as an act of service, not as an autonomous work. Under the Word and His command, we participate in His work, a participation which rests on forgiveness and not on our own fitness. Finally, to have our master in Jesus Christ is to be subjected to a direction or a formation, and to have no other concern except that of Christ.

Just as Jesus Christ is the objective revelation of God, the Holy Spirit is its subjective reality and possibility. In Jesus Christ, God says 'Yes' to man, and in the Holy Spirit, man can say 'Yes' to God. The Holy Spirit gives man a new capacity, a capacity to perceive, understand and apprehend the objective revelation of God; the Holy Spirit makes the objective revelation of God a subjective reality.

Two other matters must be discussed before we can bring this chapter to a close. The first is Barth's understanding of the relationship between revelation and Scripture. The second is an issue which we have already alluded to at the beginning of this section, namely, Barth's ecclesiology. But before we proceed, perhaps a summary of the grounds we have traversed so far is helpful at this point. Barth's revelation theology is rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. God the Father, according to Barth, is the revealer, God the Son the revelation, and God the Holy Spirit the revealedness. As the form of God's revelation, the Incarnate Son is its objective reality. The Spirit is the subjective reality of God's revelation whose role is to complete the process of revelation by creating within man that epistemic capacity in man so that the ontic in Jesus Christ can become the noetic. Balthasar accords the

⁸³ *CD* I/2, 274.

Spirit with exactly the same function when he says that the Spirit creates within man the *sensorium* with which to perceive God's objective revelation in the form of Christ. Central to all this is the Incarnation of Christ, as we have seen in the second section. It is through the Incarnation that the trinitarian activity of God in revelation is made manifest. Balthasar is in total agreement with Barth here: 'To the God who witnesses to himself and in whom we believe there belong not only the divinity of Jesus Christ, but equally, his humanity. In the one Christ the Father renders witness to himself through the Holy Spirit, and the one Christ, in the indivisible form he sets before us, witnesses to the Father in the Holy Spirit'.⁸⁴

4. The Holy Scripture and the Church

a. *Revelation and the Bible*

i. Orientation. Barth's doctrine of scripture was developed in response to the reductionism in the concept of revelation which he saw in the theology of the early church, 17th century Protestantism, and the period of the Enlightenment. The early church, in her attempt to make the 'miracle of God in the witness of his revelation perspicuous to everybody', developed her doctrine of the inspiration of scripture based solely on the work of the Holy Spirit in the emergence of the prophetic and apostolic word which constituted the Bible.⁸⁵ This soon led to a 'naive secularisation of the whole conception of revelation'. Instead of being placed into the circle of mystery which proceeds unbroken from the revelation of God to the illumination of the hearts of the recipients, the phenomenon of the Bible 'was incorporated into a view of things

⁸⁴ GL I:154.

⁸⁵ CD I/2, 519.

in which inspirations and inspired men and states have a place with all kinds of other things: have their place, that is, in the Bible, to which in a more or less well-fenced circle there may be added what we accept of saints recognised by the Church and the teaching office of the Church'.⁸⁶ Barth traces, from this standpoint, the later relativising of the unique authority of Scripture in relation to tradition as was seen in the Council of Trent.

The doctrine of inspiration which emerged in the 17th century is attacked by Barth, not because of its essential supranaturalism, but because its supranaturalism was not radical enough. Barth argues, perceptively, that the 17th century's insistence that the Bible must offer us a *divina et infallibilis historia* has reduced its doctrine of inspiration to a kind of naturalism. He writes, 'The secular nature of this postulate showed itself plainly in the assumption that we must freely approach the good God if it is not fulfilled, threatening ruin with distrust, scepticism and atheism - a threat which was no less freely carried out in the following generations, when man became convinced that the postulate cannot be fulfilled'.⁸⁷ It is this secularism, which was openly present, that led Barth to reject the 17th century doctrine of inspiration as false doctrine.

The Enlightenment simply carried on what the newer Protestantism of the 17th century has started by making 'historical' investigation the central role for the study and treatment of the Bible. The Bible loses its character as the Word of God and is now transformed into a collection of writings of highly relevant historical record. Barth makes the connection between the newer Protestantism's and the

⁸⁶ CD I/2, 519.

⁸⁷ CD I/2, 525.

Enlightenment's treatment of the Bible in the following statement: '... this merely revealed what high orthodoxy had already sought and attained under the apparently supranaturalistic form: the understanding and use of the Bible as an instrument separated from the free grace of God and put into the hands of man'.⁸⁸ To be sure, the solution to the naive reductionism of the Enlightenment's understanding of the Bible is therefore not to be found in the renewal of the doctrine of inspiration of high orthodoxy.

From the above discussion, it is not difficult to see why Barth is so insistent that due recognition to both the divine and human elements in Scripture must be given. Sole emphasis on the pneumatic element of inspiration, like the one espoused by the early church has resulted in the reduction of the essential human element. For Barth, the price to be paid for such an approach is far too high.

By, as it were, damping down the word of man as such, by transforming it into a word of man which is real only in appearance, a Word of God which can be grasped in human speech, the whole mystery was lost, the mystery of the freedom of its presence both in the mouths of the biblical witnesses and also in our ears and hearts. And the miracle which took place, which was recounted in various forms about the biblical witness and the result of which was admired in the Bible, has only the name in common with the miracle of the presence of the Word of God.⁸⁹

Similarly, in the hands of the 17th century theologians of high orthodoxy, the Bible was grounded upon itself, apart from the mystery of God. The Reformers' view of the Bible which was always intricately interwoven into the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and of God's sovereignty and free grace, was abandoned. The Bible

⁸⁸ *CD* I/2, 523.

⁸⁹ *CD* I/2, 519.

became a 'paper pope', wholly given into the hands of its interpreter.⁹⁰ Robbed of its free and spiritual force, it has become an instrument of human power. Robbed of its unique authority, the Bible has become a book very similar to the holy books of other religions. It became a product and achievement of the human spirit. In the hands of large sections of the Evangelical Churches, and for a long period of time, the Bible's authority was restricted to the 'biblical documents as such and in their historico-literary givenness, about which the doctrine of inspiration has attested such remarkable things'.⁹¹

The reinterpretation of the Bible as the document of a specific history and the so-called spirit of the Bible as the spirit of history, which was engendered in various ways by the rationalists of the 18th century, by Herder and Schleiermacher, and by Ritschl and the religious historicists, has in no wise broadened the outlook on the Bible that was introduced by the Evangelicalism of the 17th century. The only way forward for Barth is to return to the theology of the Reformers. For it is in the teaching of the Reformers that the delicate balance of the human and the divine in scripture is taken seriously. The Reformers' doctrine of inspiration, Barth writes, 'is an honouring of God and of the free grace of God'.⁹² For them the Bible is never a revealed book of oracles - the question of the inspired Word is always the question of that which inspires and controls the Word. The Bible is a witness to revelation. This witness is the result of the sovereign act of God since, according to the theology

⁹⁰ *CD* I/2, 526.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *CD* I/2, 522.

of the Reformers, only God can bear witness to God.⁹³ The Reformers saw that the inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit must be set in the context of the 'relationship of the biblical witnesses to the very definite content of their witness'. It is this content that inspires them, making their writing a participation of the work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore Holy Scripture. Barth maintains that Luther has always insisted that scripture is not of itself: 'it is always of Christ as Lord and King that scripture has and again and again acquired for us its clarity as the divine Word'.⁹⁴ The problem with the newer Protestantism's understanding of scripture becomes clearer in the light of the Reformers' teaching. The new understanding of biblical inspiration meant that the Bible as the Word of God was transformed from a statement of the free and sovereign work of God into a statement about 'the nature of the human enquiry brought under human control'.

The Bible as the Word of God surreptitiously became a part of the natural knowledge of God, i.e., of that knowledge of God which man can have without the free grace of God, by his own power, and with direct insight and assurance. That the highly supernaturalistic form in which this step was made was only a form used because no better was available is proved by the haste with which it was abandoned almost as soon as it was adopted.⁹⁵

The teaching of the Reformers, Barth maintains, does not commit the grievous errors of a supranaturalism that can so easily slip into a kind of naturalism, where the real human word is the real Word of God, and where 'the real humanity of it being more

⁹³ 'There exists an exact correspondence between the certainty with which the word of the apostles and prophets was the Word of God in itself, or of them, and the certainty with which it as such illumines us. In both cases only God can bear witness to God ...' (CD I/2, 521).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ CD I/2, 518.

or less compounded by a foolish conception of its divinity'.⁹⁶ In the same way, the teaching of the Reformers safeguarded the freedom and sovereignty of God. Thus Barth is beholden to the Reformers' understanding of scripture: 'On their lips and understanding this is the true statement concerning the Bible which is always indispensable to the Church'.⁹⁷

ii. The Bible and Revelation. Barth's teaching of the nature and function of scripture must be understood from the above context. His doctrine can be summarised as follows. Firstly, scripture is a witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The revelation of God, i.e., his self-disclosure in the Incarnation of his Son, is distinguished from and prior to Holy Scripture. The former makes the latter possible: 'It is because God has revealed himself, and as He has done so, that there is a Word of God, and therefore Holy Scripture and proclamation as the Word of God, and therefore Holy Scripture and proclamation as the Word of God, and therefore the relation and correspondence between the two, and therefore the possibility and necessity of this question of their agreement'.⁹⁸

As witness, the Bible is distinguished from the revelation itself. For a witness is not identical to that which it witnesses. We have to do with human words and human speech in the Bible. As witness the Bible does not speak of itself - it points to the revelation of God, 'and no honest and unprejudiced reader of the Bible can ignore this historical definitiveness of the word'.⁹⁹ But the concept of witness has something

⁹⁶ CD I/2, 518.

⁹⁷ CD I/2, 522.

⁹⁸ CD I/2, 457.

⁹⁹ CD I/2, 463.

more positive to say: 'In this limitation the Bible is not distinguished from revelation'. It appears that we have here something like a paradox. The proximity of the biblical witness to the object to which it bears this witness makes the Bible, in this limited sense, indistinguishable from revelation.

It is simply revelation as it comes to us, mediating and therefore accommodating itself to us - to us who are not ourselves prophets and apostles and therefore not the immediate and direct recipients of the one revelation, witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet it is for us revelation by means of the words of the prophets and apostles written in the Bible, in which they are still alive for us as the immediate and direct recipients of revelation and by which they speak to us.¹⁰⁰

Barth is able to say that the Bible has a dignity and a validity of the Word of God. For if the Bible indeed is the witness of God's revelation, then the witness itself, as well as the revelation it attests, 'is necessarily in the power of the revelation of the Word of God attested by it, and it necessarily acquires in the Church as distinct from all other words and signs, the dignity and validity of the Word of God'.¹⁰¹

The statement 'The Bible is the Word of God', however, needs further unpacking. This statement does not mean that alongside other attributes, the Bible has the attribute of being the Word of God. To say this is to violate the Word of God which is God himself, since God is not an attribute of something else. He is Subject and Lord. 'He is Lord even over the Bible and in the Bible'.¹⁰² Furthermore the statement does not mean that the Word of God is tied to the Bible. On the contrary, it is the Bible that is tied to the Word. To say that the Bible is the Word of God is to

¹⁰⁰ *CD* I/2, 513.

¹⁰¹ *CD* I/2, 459.

¹⁰² *CD* I/2, 513.

say that it is the Word of *God*. It is therefore beyond all human control.

... it is therefore to speak about a being and event which are not under human control and foresight. Our knowledge of this being and event does not justify us in thinking and speaking of them as though they were under our control and foresight. We know this divine nature which we cannot control and foresee when we know this Word, when we know, then, what we are saying when we say that the Bible is the Word of God. That we have the Bible as the Word of God from a statement about the being and rule of God in and through the Bible into a statement about the Bible as such.¹⁰³ \

(2) Scripture *becomes* and so *is* the Word of God. Only after the above considerations can we come to this important assertion. Here we have Barth's unique and sacramental view of scripture. As we have already gathered from the above discussion, Barth wanted to emphasise both the humanity of the Biblical writers and the fact that what they have written was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The first witnesses of revelation spoke and wrote under the commission of God. They spoke and wrote as *auctores secundarii*, in obedience to this commission. As eye-witnesses and ear witnesses, they each spoke and wrote 'individually, each within his own psychological, biographical and historical possibilities, and therefore within the limits set by these possibilities'.¹⁰⁴ But placed under the lordship of God, being surrounded and impelled by his Spirit, the first witnesses stood under the *auctoritas primaria*. The prophets and apostles, in all their humanity and finitude, performed their function as witnesses of revelation for which they were chosen and called. Under the authority of their Lord they spoke as true men in the name of the true God. As witnesses they were unique in that 'they have heard his voice as we cannot hear it, as we can hear

¹⁰³ CD I/2, 527.

¹⁰⁴ CD I/2, 505.

it only through their voices'.¹⁰⁵

The Bible was written by fallible, erring men. They were individuals living in a particular time and belonging to a particular culture. Because the biblical writers wrote as men in their own cultures and historical environment, we cannot expect them to possess a compendium of truth. It follows that we should not expect to find, in their writings, solomonic or divine knowledge of all things.¹⁰⁶ The Bible is vulnerable not only in matters of historical data and scientific judgement but also in its religious, and even theological content, because everything the biblical writers say is historically related and conditioned.¹⁰⁷ Yet, in spite of all its limitations and fallibility, scripture is the kind of testimony which God uses to come and speak to us. Scripture as the Word of God is an event in which God uses the testimonies of the prophets and apostles to speak to us now. On the importance of the 'event' character of scripture in Barth's thought, J. K. S. Reid writes: 'Round this matter of event, the whole problem of Holy Scripture turns, as does also the reality and truth of this event, there is nothing already past or very future, nothing that is pure recollection or pure expectation. In this event, this original witness is the Word of God'.¹⁰⁸ Hence for

¹⁰⁵ *CD I/2*, 506. 'That is the mystery of the centre before which we always stand when we hear and read them: remembering that it was once the case (the recollection of the Church and our own recollection attests to it) that their voice reproduce the voice of God, and therefore expecting that it will be so again. The biblical concept of theopneustia points us therefore to the present, to the extent which occurs for us. Scripture has this priority, it is the Word of God'. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Barth's next point is very interesting. He insisted that we should be content to say that the biblical writers have the capacity for error, rather than say that they have actually committed errors. For we ourselves do not possess divine insight or solomonic knowledge. *CD I/2*, 508-9.

¹⁰⁷ *CD I/2*, 509.

¹⁰⁸ *The Authority of Scripture* (London: Methuen, 1957), 214.

Barth, to say the 'Word of God' is to say the 'work of God'. For what we have here is not a contemplation of a state or fact, but to witness and experience an event. This event is an act of God which rests on a free decision. It is an event which is relevant to us.¹⁰⁹

Recollection of God's past revelation discovery of the Canon, faith in the promise of the prophetic and apostolic word, or better, the self-imposing of the Bible in the virtue of its content, and to be understood only as event. In this event the Bible is God's Word. That is to say, in this event the human prophetic and apostolic word is a representative of God's Word in the same way as the word of the modern preacher is to be in the event of real proclamation: a human word which has God's commission to us behind it, a human word to which God has given himself as the object, a human word which is required and accepted by God as good, a human word in which God's own address to us *is* an event.¹¹⁰

Many of Barth's critics have taken issue on his view of the Bible in general and verbal inspiration in particular. Gordon Clark, for example, has argued that Barth's notion that the infallibility of the Bible would give man control over God is fundamentally wrong as it is 'merely the expression of God's nature and need'.¹¹¹ He finds Barth's theology self-contradictory and accuses him of irrationality, operating on the basis of 'incompatible axioms'.¹¹² The problem here, as in most cases, can be located in the misconstrual of Barth's actualism, and his sacramental understanding of revelation. Clarke's puzzlement as to how Barth can both assert and deny the authority of the Bible proceeds from a perspectival 'blind spot'. A brilliant

¹⁰⁹ CD I/2, 527.

¹¹⁰ CD I/1, 109.

¹¹¹ *Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), 225.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 224.

interpretation of Barth's view of the Bible, especially in the area of the debate of infallibility, is offered by G. Bolich, a conservative theologian, and a defender of Barth. Bolich makes the distinction between the 'ontological' and the 'functional' when discussing Barth's view of the Bible. The 'ontological' refers to the inherent authority of the Bible while the 'functional' refers to the authority of God. He writes, in support of Barth's doctrine of scripture, that

Ontologically, it is not infallible - if ontology is all that is being considered. Again, Barth's actualism resolves the matter: the scripture is not an 'in-itself', 'for-itself' entity but exists in the act of God's revelation, for God and for man, as the word of God to man in the words of man himself. Scripture proves itself functionally infallible only in the act of God's gracious opening to human eyes to see Christ - and, once opened, human eyes behold the glory of God in the earthen vessels of human words.¹¹³

The above is another way of stating Barth's sacramental understanding of scripture. Though Barth's sacramentalism may imply that in principle God speaks to us through any literature, and many of his critics have indeed used this against him, Barth taught specifically that God *in fact* uses only scripture for this purpose. Misunderstandings often occur when the reader confuses what Barth says that God, in His freedom, could do with what he says that God has actually done. The scripture is, for Barth, the supreme authority of the Church beside which there can be no equal. Barth places the tradition of the church under the authority of scripture. The Bible 'must be distinguished from and given precedence over the purely spiritual and oral life of ecclesiastical tradition'.¹¹⁴ It is the basis of the Church's recollection and the basis of her proclamation, though within the Church there is what he calls 'relative'

¹¹³ *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Illinois, IVP, 1980), 147-148.

¹¹⁴ *CD I/2*, 106.

authority. Barth's attitude towards the tradition of the church may be described as one of respectful freedom. Thompson explains that '... this respect for tradition and traditional statements is and must be combined with a freedom of the Word and under the Word, a freedom to look at past statements and to formulate them anew'.¹¹⁵

If divine infallibility cannot be ascribed to any Church confession, then in practise we have to recognise that every Church confession can be regarded only as a stage on a road which as such can be relativised and succeeded by a further stage in the form of an altered confession. Therefore respect for its authority has necessarily to be conjoined with a basic readiness to envisage a possible alteration of this kind.¹¹⁶

b. The Church

(i) The Nature of the Church. We now take up once again our discussion of the place of Church in our knowledge of God. Space does not allow us to study Barth's ecclesiology in detail.¹¹⁷ The main purpose of this sub-section is to examine the relationship between the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Church in Barth's theology. We begin by looking at Barth's understanding of the nature of the Church. For Barth, the church, as the community of the redeemed, has her basis in the Incarnation, that is to say, in the Person and work of Jesus Christ her Lord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church was brought into being - the Holy Spirit incorporates men and women into the church, he guarantees the unity of the church with Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the power, and his action the work of the co-

¹¹⁵ *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 65.

¹¹⁶ *CD I/2*, 658-9.

¹¹⁷ For a comprehensive study of Barth's ecclesiology, see C O'Grady, *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 2 Vols. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968 & 1969).

ordination of the being of Jesus Christ and that of his community as distinct from and yet enclosed within it. Just as the Holy Spirit, as himself an eternal divine 'person' or mode of being, as the Spirit of the Father and Son (*qui ex Patre Filioque procedit*), is the bond of peace between the two, so in the historical work of reconciliation he is the One who constitutes and guarantees the unity in the *totus Christus*, i.e., Jesus Christ in the heights and depths, in his transcendence and in his immanence ... He is the One who constitutes and guarantees the unity in which he is at one and the same time the heavenly head with God and the earthly body with his community.¹¹⁸

The Church is guided and guarded by the same Lord present by the Spirit. As the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit ensures that the Church is guarded against the dangers of secularism, secularisation and self-glorification. The theology of Barth establishes a very close relationship between the reconciliation of the world in Christ and the nature of the church. Christ is the Head and King of both the world and the church. The church can be seen to be the provisional form, a concrete instantiation of what Christ has in fact done for the world. Rosato writes: 'The insight is the germ of Barth's ecclesiology, whose main purpose is to show how the reconciliation of all men in Jesus Christ takes place in concrete form when Christians recognise and proclaim the real union between their existence and that of their Lord'.¹¹⁹

The church, as the community of Jesus Christ always has an event character. The Holy Spirit is not the soul of the church as the immanentism of Roman Catholicism would have us believe. Barth sought to emphasise the ontological difference between the Spirit and the church. The Spirit, while remaining always transcendent because he is always Lord, comes to the church again and again to renew her. The church's being is therefore in its becoming again and again by the

¹¹⁸ CD IV/3.2, 763ff.

¹¹⁹ *The Spirit as Lord*, 123.

Word and the Spirit. 'The Church owes its being to the continual event of its becoming by the Word and Spirit'.¹²⁰ This consistent dialectic of ontology and the dynamic is evident here in his ecclesiology as it is in all of Barth's theological thinking. The church is incorporated into the life of Christ by the Spirit. In this way the being of the church is in the very being of Jesus Christ in his act of reconciliation.

(ii) The Purpose of the Church. The Church does not exist for itself but for the world;¹²¹ it has a missionary purpose. Through it the Spirit of the living Christ reaches out to all men. We see here the sacramental nature of the church and its ministry: through the being and activity of the community of Jesus Christ, a community which comprises of, in Luther's dictum, justified sinners, the light of Christ shines to all humanity. Through the Church, Christ reaches out, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the world which is his *de jure*, but not yet *de facto*.

The community is confronted and created by the Word of God. It is *communio sanctorum*, the communion of saints, because it is *congregatio fidelium*, the gathering of the faithful. As such, it is the *coniuratio tertium*, the confederation of the witnesses who may and must speak because they believe. The community does not speak with words alone. It speaks by the very fact of its existence in the world; by its silent service to all the handicapped, weak, needy in the world. It speaks, finally, by the simple fact that it prays for the world. It does all these because this is the purpose of its summons by the Word of God. It cannot avoid these things, since it believes.¹²²

(iii) The Proclamation of the Church. The Word of God must be the theme of the proclamation of the church in order for it to be real proclamation. This means that all human talk about God, all proclamation, must be based on the self-objectification of

¹²⁰ John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 106.

¹²¹ CD IV/3.2, 763ff.

¹²² *Evangelical Theology*, 38.

God in His Word. The Word of God must be the object over and against us. And though it must be an object of human perception in order for it to be proclaimed, it cannot be something that we can possess or manipulate. We have it only because it gives itself to us.¹²³ Secondly, the Word of God is the judgement in virtue of which proclamation becomes real proclamation. 'Real proclamation, therefore, is the Word of God preaches ... [This] means human talk about God which by God's own judgement, that cannot be anticipated and never passes under our control, is true with reference both to the proclaimed object and also to the proclaiming subject, so that it is talk which has to be listened to and which rightly demands obedience'.¹²⁴ Thirdly, the Word of God is the commission, God's positive command, upon whose givenness proclamation must rest if it is to be real proclamation. Thus, human talk about God, and also as the Word of God preached, must have its basis on God's own direction, 'which fundamentally transcends all human causations'.¹²⁵ Real proclamation is therefore an event in which human talk is exalted and becomes the Word of God. The Word of God preached means 'man's talk about God in which and through which God speaks about himself'.¹²⁶ Barth is ever so careful to emphasise the human element in this phenomenon.

As Christ became true man and remains true man to all eternity, real proclamation becomes an event on the level of all human events. It can be seen and heard on this level, and its being seen and heard thus is no mere appearance but must take place in full essentiality. Without the ambivalence, the liability to misunderstanding and the vulnerability

¹²³ *CD* I/1, 91-2.

¹²⁴ *CD* I/1, 90.

¹²⁵ *CD* I/1, 90.

¹²⁶ *CD* I/1, 95.

with which this takes place, with which it is itself one event among many others, it could not be real proclamation.¹²⁷

This is the miracle of real proclamation. It is not a human willing and doing characterised in a certain way. It is primarily and decisively God's own speech.

Proclamation and the church are, of course, simply and visibly there just as the bread and wine of communion are simply and visibly there just as the distribution, eating and drinking of the bread and wine in communion take place simply and visibly. They are not simply and visibly there, however, as that which they want to be and should be, as theologically relevant entities, as realities of revelation and faith. They have ever and again to come into being as such.¹²⁸

The nature, mission and proclamation of the Church point not only to the fact that it is the subjective realisation of reconciliation, that is to say, the ingathering of men by the Holy Spirit to Christ, but also the subjective realisation of revelation which is the presupposition of redemption and reconciliation. 'The revelation of God in its subjective reality consists in the existence of men who have been led by God Himself to a certain conviction'. The Church is a community of men who believe in the objective reality of the revelation of God and have so appropriated this revelation for themselves (or rather they have now entered into a relationship with God's revelation in the Son by the Spirit) that they could no longer understand their own existence apart from it. 'They cannot, therefore, understand themselves except as the brethren of the Son, as bearers and doers of the Word of God'.¹²⁹ We are then brought back to the statement of Luther, which is so central to Barth, that the church

¹²⁷ *CD* I/1, 94.

¹²⁸ *CD* I/1, 88.

¹²⁹ *CD* I/2, 232.

is the locus within which Christ can be found¹³⁰ and where theological utterances are made and corrected.¹³¹

The burden of this chapter is to examine the revelation theology of Karl Barth. Revelation is an event which involves the Triune God: God the Father is revealed in the Son by the Holy Spirit. This revelation is received by faith and in the church. As we have seen in the last chapter, for Barth, faith and knowledge cannot be separated. The question which must be asked at this point then is, What are the limits of our knowledge of God? And can we speak of the veracity of the knowledge of God which is the knowledge of faith? These are the questions which we will address in the next chapter.

¹³⁰ Cf., *CD* I/2, 213.

¹³¹ *CD* I/1, 3ff.

CHAPTER VI

THE LIMITS AND VERACITY OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

1. The Abyss Between God and Man

In the final section of the fourth chapter, we discussed Barth's response to natural theology. According to him, the natural theologies of Roman Catholicism and Liberal Protestantism are an affront to the Gospel of grace because they idolise human autonomy and attribute powers to reason which it does not possess. Barth maintains that we cannot attain to the knowledge of God by our natural faculties because of the abyss between God and us caused by creation and sin. The burden of this section is to examine the theological justifications for his viewpoint.

Barth sets out his doctrine of Creation in four lengthy sections in the third volume of his *Church Dogmatics*. Against all strands of pantheism and panentheism Barth argues clearly and forcefully that the reality of God and that of the world are distinct from one another. The proposition that God created heaven and earth asserts that the world truly *is*, it truly *exists*. But this proposition also points to the truth that the world is a whole reality distinct from God.¹ Furthermore the above proposition asserts that the reality and being of the world has its origin from and is totally dependent on God. The world came into being as the result of the divine will. Because its whole sphere of reality comes from God, it has no power over its existence and form. That is to say, the cosmos does not belong to itself and cannot control itself. It is determined and established by God who alone is self-sufficient.²

¹ CD III/1, 5.

² CD III/1, 7.

The word *bara*' used in Genesis 1 denotes that the divine creation is different from all other. It denotes that the Creator, in creating the world, did not use any existing material: the world was created *ex nihilo*. This implies that the 'Subject' here can only be God and 'no one apart from him - no creature'.³ The world, created out of nothing, is the counterpart (*Gegenüber*) of the reality of God.⁴ This counter reality comprises of two components. The first is that of irrational nature, creatures which exist for and alongside of themselves (*Miteinander und Nebeneinander*). The second is man, the counter to God as being something of a second being in regard to God (*Gott gegenüber Zweiten*). Unlike the other creatures, man exists as something - he is directed towards and for a partner (*Gegeneinander und Füreinander*).

The doctrine of creation is an article of faith. It is only by faith that we know that the world is real and that God does not exist alone.⁵ The fact that the created reality has a nature of its own is not self-evident. Neither is it self-evident that the world and its whole sphere of reality comes from God, and that God is before the world. The doctrine of creation therefore is a 'mystery'. There is not a word of the first article, Barth argues, which does not point to mystery.

In line with the tradition of Reformed theology, Barth integrates the doctrine of creation with the doctrine of redemption. To be sure, redemption and reconciliation are not to be equated with creation. They, however, have their presupposition in creation, and in this sense, begin with it. The creation is the establishment of a place for the history of the covenant of grace. As God's first work, creation is the 'shell'

³ CD III/1, 16-17.

⁴ CD III/1, 5, 7-8, 13, 15, 185.

⁵ CD III/1, 5.

of God's second work and belongs to the entirety of God's work, which must be seen as one - the accomplishment of the covenant of grace. As the first amongst God's work, creation therefore stands indissolubly connected with all of God's other works, sharing the same dignity. Its history belongs to the history of the covenant of grace or salvation-history 'which is the history to which all other history is determined'. So although it would be truer to say that creation follows the covenant of grace, creation is seen as God's first work because it sets the stage for the story of the covenant of grace. Because creation and covenant cannot be separated, the former cannot be seen as the first cause or final contingency in all things.⁶ Although the external dynamics of covenant rest on creation, and the covenant is the goal of creation while creation is the way of the covenant, creation is not the inner basis of the covenant. Creation is the covenant's external basis: it makes the covenant technically possible. The inner basis of the covenant, according to Barth, is the free love of God.⁷

This view of creation is to be commended. In an essay entitled 'Karl Barth and the Doctrine of Creation', W. A. Whitehouse highlights the strengths of Barth's approach.⁸ Barth's doctrine of creation is truly theological. It is worked from the biblical testimony and not from scientific and metaphysical speculations and theories. This approach also takes the activity of God in creating the world seriously. Barth explains that '[w]hen we come to the predicate "creator" in the credal statement the main point to be made is that it encloses an event, a completed act. The Creator does

⁶ CD III/1, 42-43.

⁷ CD III/1, 97-98.

⁸ W. A. Whitehouse, *The Authority of Grace* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 11.

not just "exist". He has done something: *creavit*; He has accomplished the *creatio*'.⁹ Furthermore it affirms the goodness of that which was created. And finally, Barth's doctrine of creation is not a peripheral theme but is located within the context of covenant redemption.

The only approach to the doctrine of creation for Barth is to be found in Jesus Christ. The ontological difference between God and the world which has considerable bearing on man's natural noetic capabilities, and the indissoluble connection between creation and covenant makes this conclusion inevitable. Jesus Christ is not only the Word by which God accomplishes creation, through him God has disclosed to us the fact that he is Creator of the world.

Barth's theological anthropology also proceeds from his understanding of the relationship between creation and covenant. As the counterpart of God man is the reflection or copy of the divine life.¹⁰ The relationship between God and man is the relation of the I and Thou. According to Barth, only man enjoys this special relationship with God. It is only on the basis of this relationship ^{can} that we ~~that~~ conceive and understand the *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and man. This is not established on the basis of an *analogia entis* but an *analogia relationis*, a term which Barth borrows from Bonhoeffer. The *Imago Dei* is not interpreted to be rationality or freedom of will or the triple faculties of memory, intellect and will. It is conceived in the I-Thou relationship, and this, according to Barth, is concretised and fulfilled in the duality of man, that is to say, in the differentiation and relationship of the sexes. 'Man is no more solitary than God. But as God is One, and He alone is God,

⁹ CD III/1, 13.

¹⁰ CD III/1, 184ff.

so man is one and alone, and two only in duality of his kind, i.e., in the duality of man and woman'.¹¹ The I-Thou relationship is first constitutive of God, and then for man created by God. The *Imago Dei*, conceived in this way, is a special grace from God and could not therefore be the possession of man. This for Barth is the only real principle of identification and differentiation; it is the true *humanum*, the true creaturely image of God.

Only the covenant unites man with God. Man's creation is said to be the 'external presupposition of the covenant'.¹² By nature man is God's correspondent in radical dissimilarity and therefore not a part of the covenant. Considered *in abstracto*, man is such a being that the Fall is an ontological necessity.¹³ But man cannot be conceived in this way since he is created for the purpose of covenantal relationship. From the outset everything must be understood from this two-fold reality: 'It is not for nothing but something; yet it is something on the edge of nothing, bordering it and menaced by it, and having no power of itself to overcome the danger'.¹⁴ The distinction between creation and its ground points to a radical dissimilarity and as such an abyss between God and man. And it is because of this gulf that revelation is absolutely necessary for theological knowledge.

Barth argues further that man cannot attain to the knowledge of God because of sin. The sinfulness of man presents an ontological obstacle to his knowledge of God. This, however, has nothing to do with the effects of sin on the *Imago Dei*. Barth

¹¹ CD III/1, 186.

¹² CD III/1, 94, 98, 228, section 41.

¹³ CD III/2, 146, 220.

¹⁴ CD III/1, 376.

argues that the image of God in man remains even after the Fall. The image of God is not lost either partially or completely, formally or materially as the result of the Fall. The Reformers have argued that the Fall has distorted the Image of God in man because they understood the *Imago* as the *rectitudo animae* or *status integritatis* which man possessed before the Fall. Barth argues that nothing in Genesis suggests that the image of God is forfeited on account of the Fall.

The biblical saga knows nothing of an original ideal man either in Gen. 1, Gen. 2, or elsewhere. Hence it is not surprising that neither the rest of the Old Testament or the New is any trace of the abrogation of this ideal state, or the partial or complete destruction of the *Imago Dei*. What man does not possess he can neither bequeath nor forfeit. And on the other hand the divine intention at the creation of man, and consequent promise and pledge given with it, cannot be lost or subjected to partial or complete destruction.¹⁵

The Image of God in man is conceived in the context of the *analogia relationis* which is established by grace and therefore not affected by the Fall.

But this does not mean that Barth does not take sin seriously. The Fall radically and completely corrupts the nature of man. After the Fall, man's nature is no-nature (*Un-natur*) and his knowledge no-knowledge (*Unerkenntnis*).¹⁶ Barth of course concedes the fact that man, even in his fallen state is capable of acquiring some form of knowledge. But this knowledge is fragmentary, relative and lacks certitude: it consists of connecting a set of given elements with proper hypothesis. Man, by himself, cannot attain to the true sense of God, of himself, and of the world. This is hidden from him. It can only be obtained, according to Barth, through revelation. The veracity of man's knowledge of God comes from the reality of God's

¹⁵ CD III/1, 200.

¹⁶ CD III/2, 29, 31-32, 38-48.

revelation which is apprehended by faith. This is the concern of the next section.

2. The *Terminus A Quo* and *Terminus Ad Quem* of Theological Knowledge

The abyss between God and man caused by creation and sin creates serious doubts about the theological respectability of natural theology. Theological knowledge is possible only because God has disclosed himself to man. Man's views and conceptions, in their own inner power, and in virtue of their own capacity, cannot attain this knowledge. One cannot even speak of 'a potentiality of our cognition which has to be actualised by revelation'.¹⁷ The fundamental thesis that determines and shapes Barth's theory of theological knowledge is 'God is known by God and by God alone'.¹⁸ To this fundamental principle Barth adds that God must be, and is, known with absolute certitude. Only God can convey this certitude. This he does through revelation, for, according to Barth, 'God's revelation is ... his knowability',¹⁹ and the veracity of our knowledge of God is the veracity of his revelation.²⁰

Our knowledge of God according to Barth is clearly explicated by its *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*, that is, its beginning and goal. He explains that 'since we are dealing with an event, limit here is to be understood in the sense of *terminus*. What happens when God becomes clear and understandable to us, and visible to us in form, is when we know the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of this event, the

¹⁷ CD II/1, 180.

¹⁸ CD II/1, 179. 'Gott wird nur durch Gott erkannt'. Cf., KD II/1, 47, 202.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ CD II/1, 186ff.

point with which it begins and the point at which it ends'.²¹

According to Barth, the first word which God conveys to man in his knowledge of him is his hiddenness. The *terminus a quo*, as the starting point of theological knowledge, deals with this truth. Barth stresses that even the concept of the hiddenness of God must not be seen as a product of human inquiry. It is revealed to man - God's first Word to man. Because the hiddenness of God is God's Word to us and therefore God's revelation of himself, it must not be understood as our 'despairing resignation' and 'ignorance'. Rather it must be seen as the starting point of our real knowledge of God, the original starting point of our way of knowing and actual cognisance of God: 'The confession of God's hiddenness is the confession of God's revelation as the beginning of our cognisance of God'.²² In this way, the knowledge of the hiddenness of God is a consequence of faith; it is *Glaubenssatz*. This is because the knowledge of the hiddenness of God points to our impotence. It points to the fact that our view, knowledge and conceptions of God are not based on some qualitative potentialities in us. Rather it is 'a miraculous work of divine good pleasure'.²³ In a similar vein, because we have received permission to know him in our human viewing and conceiving, and to speak of him in our human language, this does not mean that our human viewing, conceiving and speaking possess their own capacity for God, even if this is understood as a capacity that is 'awakened' (*erwecktes*) or 'actualised' (*actualisertes*) by revelation and by faith. 'On the contrary, our viewing, conceiving and speaking are placed in service and put to use for which

²¹ CD II/1, 184.

²² CD II/1, 192.

²³ CD II/1, 184.

they have, of and in themselves, no fitness either before or after this takes place'.²⁴

What does Barth mean when he speaks about the hiddenness of God? Barth explains that the hiddenness of God does not only point to the question of his incomprehensibility. Although it does involve this as well, Barth says that we must go further than that. 'The statement of the hiddenness of God says of it as such that it cannot, on the ground of man's own capacity, be the knowledge of God'.²⁵ This statement, however, needs further clarification. The above statement means that every general consideration of the inapprehensibility of 'God' made in philosophy - the incomprehensibility of supreme being in the sense of Plato, Plotinus and Kant - every general metaphysical speculation about the inapprehensibility of the absolute must not be used to base our understanding of the hiddenness of God, since they are products of human reason and therefore of human viewing and conceiving. 'We must not', Barth asserts, 'base the hiddenness of God on the inapprehensibility of the infinite, the absolute, that which exists in and of itself, etc. For all this in itself and as such (whether it is or not, and whatever it may be) is the product of human reason in spite of and in its supposed inapprehensibility. It is not, therefore, identical with God and is in no way a constituent part of the divine hiddenness'. The hiddenness of God means that God is not a being that we can spiritually appropriate.

For God - the living God who encounters us in Jesus Christ - is not such a one as can be appropriated by us, and in so doing permit and command and therefore adapt us to appropriate him as well. It is because the fellowship between God and us is established and continues by God's grace that God is hidden from us. All our efforts to apprehend him by ourselves shipwreck on this. He is always the One who will first and foremost apprehend and possess us. It is only on the basis of this, and in the area marked out by it that there

²⁴ *CD* II/1:94.

²⁵ *CD* II/1, 187.

can and should be our own apprehension of God.²⁶

Thus from the above, it is clear that for Barth God cannot be encompassed by us in any way. We cannot incorporate him in our worldview, and if we try to do this, we will only reveal our godlessness. Involuntarily we would have confirmed the hiddenness of God.

Barth offers three reasons why God cannot be apprehended by us. Firstly, we are one with what we apprehend. As creatures we are one with the created world. Therefore, as creatures, we can have intuitions and concepts about the world. We, however, have no quality which renders us equal to God: 'Between God and man, as between God and the creature in general, there consists an irrevocable otherness. Because this is so, because the mystery of unity underlying all our other apprehension does not exist here, we cannot conceive of God ourselves'.²⁷ Secondly, we master what we comprehend. This means that we limit what we intuit, conceive and apprehend, and by thus delimiting these things, we become masters of and are superior to that which we encompass. Despite puzzles and mysteries, this is essentially our relationship with the world - the apparent infinity of the world is in fact limited by the finite and the apparent finitude is limited by the infinite. The Absolute and Relative (*das Absolute und das Relative*), being for itself and being in itself (*das für*

²⁶ CD II/1, 188.

²⁷ CD II/1, 189. Even the fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God cannot, as we have seen, be considered as a legitimation for saying that man resembles God: 'The fact that we are created in the likeness of God means that God has determined us to bear witness to his existence and in our existence. But it does not mean that we possess and discover an attribute within ourselves on the basis of which we are on a level with God ... Because, therefore, we do not find in ourselves anything which resembles God, we cannot apprehend him by ourselves'. CD II/1, 188.

sich und das an sich Seinde) are also limited in this way making them dialectical and reversible concepts (*dialectische Wechselbegriffe*).²⁸ This contradiction and dialectic, which we experience within ourselves, can be mastered theoretically and practically. We cannot however master God. When we attempt to determine God by a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) or philosophical system, we are actually determining the system, not God. God cannot be mastered by us; he is hidden and unknowable by any natural power.²⁹ And thirdly, we are one originally with what we comprehend. To comprehend means to appropriate (*aneigen*). Nothing can be appropriated without an original unity (*Einheit*) between the appropriated and the one who appropriates it. It is through this unity that we know the world and worldly objects. But between God and the world there is no unity at all. 'Creation by God - even the creation of man - means the institution of an existence really distinct from the existence of God'.³⁰

Barth acknowledges the fact that we become aware of the world by intuitions (*Anschauungen*) and concepts (*Begriffe*). Our awareness of objects comes through intentions and images. Concepts are counter images through which we appropriate images and arrange them in our thoughts. Intuitions and concepts enable us to speak about different things. It follows that since we can and do speak about God, we are able to perceive and think of him.³¹ But since God is known by God alone, Barth maintains that if we do know him by our concepts and intuitions, this is not due either to the quality or power or by the actualisation of our cognitive faculty. Our

²⁸ *CD* II/1, 188; Cf., *KD* II/1, 220.

²⁹ *CD* II/1, 189; Cf., *KD* II/1, 211-212.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Cf., *KD* II/1, 212.

³¹ *CD* II/1, 181; Cf., *KD* II/1, 203.

knowledge of God is possible only by faith in his revelation. Hence our intuitions and concepts are instruments in our knowledge of God. Though we are active in their formation, their veracity is entirely dependent on God, whose truth supervenes upon them. For this reason, Barth is anxious to recover the proper understanding of the *Deus definiri nequit*, a term which has been seriously misunderstood by mystical theology, especially by Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite and his disciples. Against the apophatism of the mystical theologians Barth understands the *Deus definiri nequit* as 'the confession of God's revelation by which we certainly affirm the incapacity of our own viewing and conceiving of God is disclosed, but by which the mouth is not stopped but opened by the delivery of the divine mandate'.³² In this way Barth's understanding of the term is more positive and radical than that of the mystical theologians. Positively, the *Deus definiri nequit* reminds the Church that she has received a permission and a command to keep the true knowledge of God bestowed upon it. Negatively, the term prohibits the Church from escaping into philosophy's supposed knowledge of the absolute. Taking the latter course will no doubt lead the Church to a god who will certainly be apprehensible. But it will not be the true God. 'The true God is the hidden God. The Church must not flee from the task of knowing and proclaiming just this God'.³³

In his revelation, the God whom man cannot apprehend, makes himself apprehensible and is therefore apprehended. Man is therefore not left alone, but, as we have already seen in previous chapters, stands before God in the miracle of his revelation. This optimism stems from the reality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

³² *CD* II/1, 193.

³³ *Ibid.*

Through Christ God works and enters into an actual relationship with man.

In his revelation in Jesus Christ, the hidden God has indeed made himself apprehensible. Not directly, but indirectly. Not by sight, but by faith. Not in his being, but in sign. Not, then, by the dissolution of his hiddenness - but apprehensibly. The revelation of God is that God has given to the creature whom he has chosen and determined to this end the commission and the power to take his place and represent him, to bear witness to him. The Word was made flesh: this is the first, original and controlling sign of all signs.³⁴

By the *terminus ad quem* of the knowledge of God, Barth refers to the end and goal of that event or movement of human action which constitutes theological knowledge. The *terminus ad quem* of our knowledge of God is determined by its object; it is the limit by which it is both separated from and united to its object.³⁵ True theological knowledge, according to Barth, involves a circular course: God is known only by and through God. This knowledge, in both its objective and subjective aspects, is made possible by God alone. Theology, if it is to be faithful to its object, cannot place itself outside this circular course. It is only when one is operating within this course that one can proceed with confidence and be assured of the veracity of one's knowledge of God.

In the process of revelation, God objectifies himself in the world, thus becoming an object of our cognisance, at once similar and dissimilar to other objects. Apart from this event, God-talk would be impossible.³⁶ As an object of our cognisance, God must be a reality in our world, since 'our knowledge must be the

³⁴ CD II/1, 199.

³⁵ CD II/1, 204.

³⁶ CD II/1, 205.

knowledge of world-reality if it is really going to be our knowledge'.³⁷ But this worldly reality must always be distinguished from other worldly realities because of the gracious presence of God. That is to say, that this object attests to God is the result of the gracious work of the Word and Spirit of God and in the freedom of his love. It is through this miracle of God's grace that this object 'really attests God, that it is not, therefore, something quite different standing in the place of God, and that therefore our knowledge of God is true'.³⁸ In knowing God, we do not have to do with something or someone else, but with God himself; that is, God in his revelation. Furthermore, our knowledge of God is not random, or at risk of being mistaken. It is 'right', 'unassailable' and 'trustworthy'. The veracity of our knowledge of God is the veracity of his revelation. 'Our knowledge of God is then true - as true as it can be as our knowledge, which cannot coincide with the knowledge of God'.³⁹

Barth's central thesis concerning the veracity of our knowledge of God is clear. Human knowledge of God is true because God's revelation is true: God is truly God in his revelation. But what is the character of our participation in the knowledge of God? Barth maintains that our participation of the truth of God's revelation can only be a participation of (1) Thankfulness (*Dankbarkeit*), (2) wondering awe (*Ehrfurcht*) and (3) duty (*Dürfen*).

Firstly, then, our participation in God's revelation should basically consist of the offering of our thanks because our knowledge of God does not have its necessity in itself or in ourselves but in God. This means that our participation in God's

³⁷ CD II/1, 207.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ CD II/1, 209.

revelation must be understood as a response and an acknowledgement of that revelation. As acknowledgement our knowledge of God 'is put under the measure, order and speaking of his revelation'.⁴⁰ That is to say, this revelation of God determines our thinking and speaking. The object brings with it the possibility and necessity as well as delimits our various perceptions and conceptions. As a work of thanksgiving or gratitude, the knowledge of God as participation in the veracity of the revelation of God must also take place in joyfulness. The revelation of God that reaches us, the revelation in which we participate must fully involve us. By this involvement, which places us under the rule of the object, we become obedient. Revelation reaches us from without; but this also means that it actually comes to us and therefore into us. Without ceasing to be transcendent, the revelation of God becomes immanent in us. On the basis of this distinction between the transcendence and immanence, our obedience to the revelation is free: since our acknowledgement of the revelation of God is a subjectivity of our acknowledgement of his revelation, it is our elevation above ourselves. It is this that of necessity makes our knowledge of God a joyful action.⁴¹ Secondly, our participation in God's revelation should always be an act of wondering awe. There is a general incongruence between God and man, between the known and the knower. True knowledge of God would necessarily mean the overcoming of this congruence. This has been accomplished on the side of God (since it cannot be overcome from man's side) through the grace of revelation. The fact that we do actually know God means that we are placed in God's

⁴⁰ *CD II/1*, 218.

⁴¹ *CD II/1*, 219.

revelation which is apprehended by faith.⁴² 'Awe' necessarily refers to the distance between our work and its object which is overcome by grace. 'In awe we gratefully let grace be grace, and always receive it as such. We never let reception become taking. Our knowledge of God is always compelled to be a prayer of thanksgiving, penitence and intercession. It is only in this way that there is knowledge of God'.⁴³ Our participation in God's revelation is, finally, one of obligation. It is our duty to know God. Our intuitions, concepts and words correspond to their exterior object (*Gegenstand*), God, because by the grace of faith there is a positive relationship between our thinking and its object. This positive relation implies that between us and God there is a community (*Gemeinschaft*). It is on the basis of this communion that our knowledge of God is true and not fictional.

Barth acknowledges that his line of argument leads to a *circulus veritatis*. There are, however, many kinds of *circuli veritatis*. They do not only have to do with theological knowledge: 'There are in fact other circular courses which are in their own way legitimate and impressive and full of solutions and fruitful, but in which there is never any question of the knowledge of God, but more or less clearly of one of different forms of a human self-knowledge metaphysically constructed'.⁴⁴ As a precaution against a possible confusion these other circular courses must be avoided. It is only in faith that we can move into the *circulus veritatis Dei* 'we must openly and honestly let ourselves be asked whether and how far this really took place in faith'.⁴⁵

⁴² CD II/1, 220.

⁴³ CD II/1, 223.

⁴⁴ CD II/1, 244.

⁴⁵ CD II/1, 246.

The presupposition of faith cannot go unquestioned. Now faith comes from outside of us and not from ourselves. Hence it follows that 'the substantiation of our faith and therefore the necessary confirmation of our systematic deliberations and affirmations in respect of the knowledge of God must also come to us from without'.⁴⁶ The *circulus veritatis* which Barth is referring to and argues for can have nothing to do 'with an act of synthesis executed by ourselves'. It is an answer only when it is not our answer but a witness of God's answer. In this respect we cannot say anything conclusively about it by ourselves: 'If we try to speak conclusively of the limits of our knowledge of God and of the knowledge of God generally, we can come to no conclusion'. We can only speak of the divine reality by which the *circulus veritatis Dei* is encompassed. That reality is Jesus Christ. 'We can, therefore, only describe him again, and often, and in the last resort infinitely often'.⁴⁷ This, Barth points out, does not only mean generally that we can know God only through Christ. 'It has the particular meaning that we must know him as the first and proper Subject of the knowledge of God'.⁴⁸ For in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).

... faith consists absolutely in the fact that we want to know only about the temptation and comfort that have come upon Jesus Christ, only about his Cross and resurrection as the question, really directed to us but in this way really answered for us, of our action: of the correction of our line of thought; of the limits and the veracity of our knowledge of God.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ CD II/1, 249.

⁴⁷ CD II/1, 250.

⁴⁸ CD II/1, 252.

⁴⁹ CD II/1, 254.

By speaking thus of the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of man's knowledge of God, Barth has brilliantly revitalised Luther's dictum that God, in his revelation, is both *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus*: God is revealed in his hiddenness and hidden in his revelation. To be sure Barth does not mean by this the scholastic notion of the *potentia Dei ordinata/absoluta* which envisages the possibility of metaphysical speculation about deity based on some 'ordained' power. Quite to the contrary, Barth, as we have seen, emphasises, like Luther, that God can only be known as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. The *terminus a quo/ad quem* shows that God can only be known in his revelation, and this revelation is conceived in a tension of hidden/revealed, of mystery/revelation. If the *terminus a quo* is understood as a part of God's revelation, then there is no *deus absconditus* in the sense of the principle of the unrecognisability of God. Luther, in making this distinction, has been charged with speaking about the two wills of God or even two Gods. This charge can be shown to be without foundation when seen in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. Jüngel argues rightly that this distinction is theologically legitimate (and in fact necessary) so long as it is understood in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁰ This distinction speaks of God in motion between his Whence and Where-to. The trinitarian distinction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit shows that this movement of the Whence and Where-to of God is nothing other than God himself. The distinction therefore implies the fact that God himself is both origin and goal. This Barth tries to show with great persistence. The *terminus a quo* of our knowledge of God is at the same time the *terminus ad quem*. The *deus absconditus*, and faith in

⁵⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983) 345.

him, constitutes the proper starting point of our knowledge of God, just as the *deus revelatus* and faith in him constitutes the end of this knowledge. God is known only by God. In this sense, as Jüngel correctly points out,

... the differentiation between God and God can never be understood as a contradiction in God. There is a threat of such a contradiction in God in Lutheran dogmatics, to the extent that it does not gauge the distinction between the differentiation of the triune God. God does not contradict himself. God corresponds to himself.⁵¹

3. Theological Science

In this section it is purposed to examine Barth's understanding of the place, function and method of theology. This understanding has gone through several stages of development throughout his long career. The first phase, which spans the period when the young Barth was a student first at Berlin where he came under the influence of Adolph Harnack, and subsequently at Marburg where he came under the tutelage of Wilhelm Herrmann, may be best described as his pre-critical phase. During this period Barth was introduced to and became an enthusiastic student of Schleiermacher. Already in this period the young Barth was deeply interested in the question of scientific method and the problem of the interpenetration of Christianity and culture, a problem which was most acute in the nineteenth century and was inherited by twentieth century European Christianity. So enmeshed is Christianity with the culture of the day that it had become nothing more than an aspect of that culture and the historical life of European civilisation. How can the Church, when it no longer stands over and against the world, bring a genuine message to it?

The magnitude of the problem intensified for Barth when, in 1909, upon his

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 346.

entry into the ministry of the Swiss Reformed Church he became a pastor in a parish at Safenwil in Aargau, after serving a curacy in Geneva for a year. His pastoral duties, which entailed the exposition of the Bible week after week, led him into a spiritual crisis during which he discovered the 'strange new world within the Bible', a world which was in sharp conflict with the theology he learned from his teachers in the Theological faculty of Germany.⁵² Barth became disillusioned with his former theological teachers; and, in 1919, through the publication of his celebrated *Römerbrief*, Barth announced his radical perspectival shift in which the transcendence and goodness of God is exalted, and the anthropocentric starting point of theology is called into question. In his explosive book, Barth 'called upon the church to let God be God, and let man learn again how to be man, instead of trying to be God'.⁵³ This is the second phase of Barth's theological development.

The third phase began with the re-writing of *Römerbrief* (1920-21). During this period Barth read Overbeck, Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, and it was the insights which he gained from these studies that led him from dialectic to dogmatic thinking.⁵⁴ During the summer semester of 1930 Barth also offered a seminar on Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Not long after this he published his book entitled *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*. In the preface of the second edition of the book (1958) Barth writes.

⁵² *Word of God and Word of Man*, E.T. by Douglas Horton (Boston, Chicago, 1928), 28-50.

⁵³ T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth. Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 7.

⁵⁴ T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth. An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1930-31* (London: SCM, 1962), 48ff.

Only a comparatively few commentators, for example Hans Urs von Balthasar, have realised my interest in Anselm was never a side-issue for me or - assuming I am more or less correct in my historical interpretation of St Anselm - realised how much it has influenced me or been absorbed into my own line of thinking. Most of them have completely failed to see that in this book on Anselm I am working with a vital key, if not the key, to an understanding of that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my *Church Dogmatics* as the only one proper to theology.⁵⁵

The *Church Dogmatics* was written using those Anselmian principles that have so profoundly influenced Barth. The definitive and final break with anthropocentric theology is made here. And even though it has been said that this new direction can be traced back to his commentary on Romans,⁵⁶ it is here in the *Church Dogmatics* that his theological direction is sharply stated and systematically developed and applied. 'Without the grace of his revelation', Barth maintains, 'God is definitely not an object of human cognition, and definitely no object of human cognition is God'.⁵⁷

Commenting on Barth's emphasis and approach Hartwell writes.

He [Barth] categorically denies that man can know God, the world and man as they really are apart from God's particular and concrete revelation in Jesus Christ, no matter whether man assumes that he can achieve this knowledge by means of his innate capacities and endowments or whether he thinks that he gain it on the ground of a

⁵⁵ *FQI*, 11.

⁵⁶ In the 'Preface to the second edition' of the *Römerbrief*, Barth wrote: '... if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth". The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this KRISIS of human perception - Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same cross-roads - the figure of Jesus Christ'. Cf. *Epistle to the Romans* (London:OUP, 1933), 10.

⁵⁷ *CD* II/1, 205-206.

general revelation in creation or history.⁵⁸

The pivotal point in his theological development came about, according to Barth, from his study of Anselm. Describing the years 1928-38 Barth writes.

... in these years, I have had to rid myself of the last remnants of a philosophical, i.e., anthropological (in America one says 'humanistic' or 'naturalistic') foundation and exposition of Christian doctrine. The real document of this farewell is, in truth, not the much read brochure *Nein!*, directed against Brunner in 1934, but rather the book about the evidence for God of Anselm of Canterbury which appeared in 1931. Among all my books I regard this as the one written with the greatest satisfaction.⁵⁹

Although there are a number of scholars who disagree with Barth's interpretation of Anselm's theological method,⁶⁰ most agree that he has 'done perhaps more than any other one man to stimulate study and discussion of Anselm in the 20th century'.⁶¹ Dissatisfied with both the traditional and modern interpretations of the Anselm of the *Proslogion*, Barth sets out to provide his own interpretation based upon Anselm's own theological schema, and on the careful exegesis of the whole passage (*Prosl.* 2-4).⁶² Let us examine Barth's interpretation of Anselm and see how the theological method of the eleventh century theologian has influenced his

⁵⁸ Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1964), 48.

⁵⁹ *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966), 42-43.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Jerome Hamer, *Karl Barth* (London: Sands & Co. Ltd., 1962); John McIntyre, *Anselm and his Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the 'Cur Deus Homo'* (London & Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1954); and, more recently, G. Watson, 'A Study in St Anselm's Soteriology and Karl Barth's Theological Method', *SJT* 42 (1990), 493-512.

⁶¹ Louis Merton, 'Reflections on Some Recent Studies of Saint Anselm', *Monastic Studies* 3 (1965), 221.

⁶² *FQI*, 8.

own theological method.

According to Barth, theology is understood by Anselm as the *intellectus fidei*. By this he means that theology has its fundamental presupposition in faith which seeks understanding (*intelligere*). Understanding in turn would result in 'proof' and 'joy', but it is not primarily for these that faith inherently seeks. Anselm's main concern therefore, according to Barth is not 'proof' (*probare*) or joy (*laetifare*), although these are desirable. His main concern is to obtain the *intelligere* of faith.

As *intelligere* is achieved, it issues in *probare* ... what to prove means is that the validity of certain propositions advocated by Anselm is established over against those who doubt or deny them; that is to say, it means the polemic-apologetic result of *intelligere*.⁶³

The *quaerens intellectum* is immanent in the *fides*. The *intellegere* which faith seeks and finds issues in proof because *intelligere*, as we have already seen, has a polemical-apologetic result. 'Anselm wants "proof" and "joy" because he wants *intelligere* and he wants *intelligere* because he believes'.⁶⁴ This whole process is what theology is about. Since *intelligere* lies in the desire of faith, the necessity of the *intelligere* lies in the necessity of theology.

What, then, is to be understood by 'faith'? And what is the role, if any, of reason in the movement of 'faith seeking understanding'? For Anselm, faith is nothing less than an act of obedience to God involving the rectitude of the will.⁶⁵ It is the 'movement of the will' in response to the Word of Christ, which is, for Anselm,

⁶³ *FQI*, 14.

⁶⁴ *FQI*, 16-17.

⁶⁵ *FQI*, 22.

identical to the 'Word of those who preach Christ'.⁶⁶ Though faith is described as a striving of the human will not only *towards* but *into* 'God and so a participation (albeit in a manner limited by creatureliness) in God's mode of Being and so a similar participation of God's aseity, in the matchless glory of his very Self ...', it is not to be understood as something which man is able to do for himself.⁶⁷ The fact that the Word of God 'comes to us and that we have the *rectitudo volendi* to receive it, is grace'.⁶⁸ Man is therefore dependent on the prevenient grace of God (*gratia Deipraeveniente*) for faith.⁶⁹

Anselm argues further that the human *telos* gives rise to the 'right order' which must be followed. In *Cur Deus Homo* he writes: '... [the] right order requires that we believe the deep matters of the Christian faith before we presume to discuss

⁶⁶ *FQI*, 22.

⁶⁷ *FQI*, 17.

⁶⁸ *FQI*, 19.

⁶⁹ In her recent article entitled 'Fides Quaerens Intellectum: St Anselm's Method in Philosophical Theology', (*Faith & Philosophy*, Vol 9, No. 4, 1992, 407-435), Marilyn McCord Adams argues convincingly that the 'framework' for Anselm's *Proslogion* is provided by his theological anthropology. Anselmian anthropology, Adams explains, points, firstly, to the 'ontological incommensuration between a simple immutable and eternal God and fleeting creatures that "scarcely exist" by comparison'. The aseity of God means that the Divine nature is partly beyond grasp, that it is fundamentally incomprehensible by the human mind, and therefore inexpressible by human language. Secondly, Adam's Fall has caused a severe (though reparable) damage which mars the image of God in man. Thirdly, man is a rational creature, made in the image of God. They best express this impressed image when 'they strive into God with all of their powers, straining to remember, to understand and to love him above all and for his own sake'. And finally, God has a mysterious bias for mercy 'which raises hopes of Divine grace for healing, cleansing and restoring human nature from its fallen condition, thereby strengthening it for its work' (410).

them rationally ...'⁷⁰ Similarly in the *Proslogion* he insists that 'I shall not understand unless I believe'.⁷¹ The priority of faith and its precedence to reason does not mean however that faith is irrational. Faith essentially seeks rational understanding for the latter is the requirement of the former. George Hunsinger offers four reasons why this is so. Firstly, God, faith's object, Hunsinger urges, is 'a compendium of all rational truth'. Faith seeks understanding simply because of the rational nature of its object. Secondly, faith seeks understanding because its subjects, human beings, are rational creatures. Thirdly, faith seeks understanding because the relationship between the subject and the object is rational. Finally, only when theology is made rationally possible thus can it enter into the 'inner necessity' of its object. 'Theology', Hunsinger concludes, 'is neither a storming of the gates of heaven nor a *sacrificium intellectum*. It does not seek to establish the "general possibility" of the object, nor does it require a surrender of reason. It starts from an actuality and arrives at an understanding of its rational capacity ...'⁷² T. F. Torrance summarises it well when he writes that '... theology may be spoken of as the activity of reason within the knowledge bestowed on man by God, operating within the limits of noetic investigation required by the nature of the given object'.⁷³

The possibility of theology lies in the special relationship between the faith of

⁷⁰ *Cur Deus Homo*, I. i. All quotations are taken from Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (eds.) *Anselm of Canterbury*, (hereafter referred to as *AOC*) Vols I (London:SCM Press, 1974) and III (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976). The above citation is taken from *AOC* III:50.

⁷¹ *Proslogion*, c.i. Cf., *AOC* I:93.

⁷² George Hunsinger (ed. & Trans.) *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 218ff.

⁷³ *Karl Barth*, 182, 183.

the Christian, i.e., his subjective *credo*, and the teaching of the Church, the objective *Credo*. Anselm's understanding of the latter requires explanation. Authority has a very important role in the dynamics of human inquiry, especially theology. This is because the subject-matter of theology exceeds the investigator's powers. Furthermore, as fallen human beings we are ignorant and require extensive education to develop our intellectual capabilities. Anselm recognises the following authorities for theology.

- A. Pre-eminent in Anselm's list is God, who is Truth itself. God the Father, together with the Son and the Spirit is for Anselm, the soul's final authority and true teacher.⁷⁴
- B. The Holy Scriptures, which Anselm believes are infallible and perfectly trustworthy.⁷⁵
- C. The Creeds.⁷⁶
- D. The authority of the Pope,⁷⁷ and
- E. the Church Fathers.⁷⁸

Professor Stanley Kane has argued that for Anselm, Scripture is the touchstone of all truth and that Anselm's work

is a concerted effort to untangle some basic conceptual puzzles or problems arising out of the assertions of Scripture. He was looking, as he tells us, for the *ratio* which alone could overcome the apparent contradiction and make a single coherent doctrine out of the elements

⁷⁴ *Monologion* c. xviii; *De Veritate* c.i.; *Cur Deus Homo*, II, xiii; *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* c.xvi.

⁷⁵ *Cur Deus Homo* I, xviii; *De Concordia* III, vi.

⁷⁶ *Epistola* c.i.

⁷⁷ *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, c.i.

⁷⁸ *Proslogion*, Preface.

of the puzzle. Such a *ratio* would make the meaning of Scripture clear and hence give understanding where previously there had been puzzlement. This is the kind of understanding that faith seeks and that is signalled in the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*.⁷⁹

That such an approach is deemed possible implies that for Anselm there exists what Barth calls the 'two-fold affinity between *credere* and *intelligere*'.⁸⁰ The relationship between the *credo* of the Christian and that of the Church determines how far theology is possible. As *credere* of the *credo*, faith is itself an *intelligere*, distinguished from the *intelligere* which it desires only in degree and not in kind.⁸¹ The 'ultimate in knowledge' is, in this sense, already anticipated in faith. Awareness begins with faith; and understanding, which is the Christian's assent from that awareness ends in faith. In the movement from *credere* to *intelligere* is the closing of the gap which separates awareness from assent.

If *fides quaerens intellectum*, then all that remains to be considered is the gap separating this awareness that has come about and the assent which has been given. And just because the beginning and the end are already given in faith, and because all that has to be settled regarding the *intelligere* that we are speaking is the gap between these two extremes, this *intelligere* is a soluble problem and theology is a feasible task.⁸²

Theology is the process of reflecting or meditating on the faith. The notion of 'reflection' is important for Anselm, for *intelligere* cannot be explained apart from the content of what is understood, the objective *credo*. It is here, in the act of reflection,

⁷⁹ Stanley Kane, 'Fides Quaerens Intellectum in Anselm's Thought', *SJT* 26 (1973), 55.

⁸⁰ *FQI*, 25.

⁸¹ *FQI*, 24.

⁸² *FQI*, 25.

that faith and understanding come together.⁸³ There are boundaries beyond which the theologian must not venture. Consider the following passage from the *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*.

Indeed, no Christian ought to question the truth of what the Catholic Church believes in its heart and confesses with its mouth. Rather, by holding constantly and unhesitatingly to this faith, by loving it and living according to it he ought humbly, and as best he is able, to seek to discover the reason why it is true. If he is able to understand, then let him give thanks to God. But if he cannot understand, let him not toss his horn in strife but let him bow his head in reverence. For self-confident human wisdom can, by thrusting, uproot its horns more quickly than it can, by pushing roll this stone.⁸⁴

This passage must be understood in the context of Anselm's understanding of theological method. Human inquiry is always an assent to the 'that it is' (*quod sit*) of an article of faith into an awareness of 'how it might be' (*quomodo sit*). Fundamental questioning of the *quod sit* is not allowed. Once the *intelligere* transgresses this boundary, the process is no longer *intellectus fidei* - it is no longer theology. The movement from *credere* to *intelligere* must take place within the boundaries of faith's own inner rationality. 'Understood from this vantage point, Anselm's use of the *credo ut intelligam* formula signifies neither "an intellectual storming of the gates of heaven" nor the "*sacrificium intellectus*". Rather it stands as the humble motto of a Christian theologian who hungers after the *fidei ratio* even though he already possess "the certainty of faith".⁸⁵

⁸³ Elizabeth Barnes, *An Affront to the Gospel?* (Atlanta Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1987), 22.

⁸⁴ c.i. Cf., *AOC* III:11.

⁸⁵ Robert Shofner, *Anselm Revisited. A Study of the Role of the Ontological Argument in the Writings of Karl Barth & Charles Hartshorne* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 52. It is important that we say a word in Anselm's defence at this juncture, lest the passage from *De Incarnatione Verbi* just cited gives one the impression that either

The conditions which govern the theological enterprise are spelt out in eight succinct points. The first is that theological science, as science of the *Credo*, has a positive character.⁸⁶ '*Intelligere* comes about by the reflection on the *Credo* that has already been spoken and affirmed.'⁸⁷ Theology should therefore not engage in speculation. But this does not mean that Anselm does not take into consideration the data of general experience. Anselm's procedure, indeed his application of the dictum *credo ut intelligam*, is empirical, inductive and dialectic. He begins by canvassing human experience and then by interpreting the received doctrines concerning God's attributes and activities in the light of the facts gathered from experience. Similarly, when confronted by a particular theological problem, Anselm would use the tools of linguistic, conceptual and theological analysis to deal with it. But the objective *Credo* remains his highest authority. Kane explains: 'Anselm's view is that the whole content of significant knowledge is all given in revelation, while the data of experience is consulted only as a means for the elucidation of the meaning of the statements in

Anselm has an authoritarian conception of respect for ecclesiastical authorities, or that he is a fideist. We concur with Marilyn McCord Adams when she argues that Anselm's conception of authority is pedagogical. Authority serves as our tutor and guide. This conception implies that 'the point of believing authority is not to silence questions, but to enable the students to ask sensible rather than silly ones, to point inquiry in a fruitful direction, lest it come to a dead end!' (*Ibid.*, 417). The prohibition reflects Anselm's appreciation of the difficulty of the subject matter at hand: 'Where the deepest mysteries of the faith are concerned (and surely Trinity, Incarnation and Human Redemption are numbered among these), even Anselm's epistemic position is less advantageous than that of the average high school geometry student: just as the latter will get nowhere if his "proofs" transgress the theorem that the interior angles of a new branch of geometry thereby; so, Anselm believes, we humans will never make theological progress by denying Scripture, Creeds or conciliar pronouncements, or, by rejecting the institutional correctness of the Church' (*Ibid.*, 418).

⁸⁶ *FQI*, 26.

⁸⁷ *FQI*, 27.

which revelation is given'.⁸⁸

The second condition touches on the concern of the theologian: his duty is to inquire about 'how it might be' of the faith (*quomodo sit*). Recognising that this line of enquiry, if pushed to the limit, would turn theology into a-theology, Anselm hastens to remind his readers that *intelligere* should not go beyond the boundary set by the inner necessity of the articles of the *Credo*, that is to say, 'beyond the limit of faith's essential nature which corresponds to these articles'.⁸⁹ Anyone who attempts to go beyond this limit is likened to a fool.⁹⁰ Thirdly, 'every theological statement is an inadequate expression of its object'.⁹¹ Only the actual Word of Christ spoken to us is adequate. The incomprehensibility of God therefore shatters every syllogism.

Shofner comments:

Nevertheless, because God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, and because all that is participates in his reality, it is possible for our limited human conceptions, by a certain similitude or image (*per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem*) to express in symbolic fashion that which is otherwise inexpressible. But this means that even a circumspect theology can only be relative and relatively effective.⁹²

Barth concludes that 'not all "speculative" theology says what is true. But even theology which does say what is true is still "speculative" theology. Theology can neither avoid nor ignore the fact of being thus conditioned; nor ought this to make it

⁸⁸ Stanley Kane, '*Fides Quaerens Intellectum* in Anselm's Thought', 53.

⁸⁹ *FQI*, 28.

⁹⁰ *FQI*, 28.

⁹¹ *FQI*, 29.

⁹² Robert Snofner, *Anselm Revisited*, 54.

ashamed'.⁹³ Caution rather than shame should be the proper posture for theology. Fourthly, scientific certainty and the certainty of faith must be distinguished. Because theological statements, challenged by the sheer incomprehensibility of their object', they only possess scientific certainty.⁹⁴ The theologian speaks with absolute certainty only when he is quoting scriptures or other sacred authorities, but, as Anselm explains, the task of theology, that is, 'the quest of the *intelligere* in the narrower sense, begins at the very place where biblical quotation stops'.⁹⁵ Theological statements are interim-statements, they are not final but await 'better instruction from God and man'.⁹⁶

It follows from the above that 'fundamentally it is possible and indeed necessary for the science of theology to advance along its entire front'.⁹⁷ This is the fifth point. Thus directed by the wisdom of God, theology is a dynamic movement of scientific progress, an ascent from one level of *ratio* to another. For Anselm, human understanding is a process, and this is especially so when deep and difficult matters are in consideration. In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm declared the mystery of human redemption inexhaustible - regardless of how profound and sophisticated one's understanding might be, there is still more to be explored and learned.⁹⁸ But as Barth

⁹³ *FQI*, 30.

⁹⁴ *FQI*, 30.

⁹⁵ *FQI*, 31.

⁹⁶ *FQI*, 31.

⁹⁷ *FQI*, 31.

⁹⁸ It is pertinent to note that Barth's own understanding of doctrinal development was profoundly influenced by Anselm's theory of limitation of human understanding. For an essay on Barth's understanding of doctrinal development, see Colin Gunton,

was careful to emphasise, this progress for Anselm is not automatic: 'That the perfectability of theology implies for Anselm both stop and start must not be ignored'.⁹⁹ Sixthly, as we have discussed above, the Holy Scripture is the 'one concrete criterion for all theological statements'.¹⁰⁰ Scripture is the source to which the *credere* and therefore *intelligere* refer. It functions as the authoritative standard of judgement; it is *auctoritas veritatis, quam ratio colligit* (the authority of truth, which reason gathers).¹⁰¹ Seventhly, the reality of faith in and for itself: 'It is also absolutely decisive for knowledge that what is Right should be rightly believed'.¹⁰² Without 'right belief' and thus the possibility of 'right knowledge', the very scientific nature of theology must be called into question. Anselm stressed the importance of the purity of heart ('right heart') of the theologian. Barth explains.

What is required is a pure heart, eyes that have been opened, child-like obedience, a life in the Spirit, rich nourishment from the Holy Scripture to make him capable of finding these answers. For him it goes without saying that where faith is really faith, that is to say obedience, the fight between bats and owls over the reality of the sun's rays will just not happen and that a theology that is grounded on the obedience of faith will be a positive theology. He knows perfectly well that in saying this he is taking a risk and so he adds that even this necessary connection between faith in what is right and right faith (and vice versa) has to be taken in faith to be understood. For only in faith could this connection between the obedience of faith and the faith of the Church be experienced and only in experience could it be understood.¹⁰³

'Karl Barth and the Development of Christian Doctrine', *SJT*, 25 (1972), 171-180.

⁹⁹ *FQI*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ *FQI*, 32.

¹⁰¹ *FQI*, 33.

¹⁰² *FQI*, 33.

¹⁰³ *FQI*, 35.

The above leads us, then, to the final condition, one which is '*sui generis* from all the others and which conditions all others and makes them relative'.¹⁰⁴ This is the connection between theology and prayer. Anselm is convinced that our human search for God is a matter of Divine-human collaboration, involving initiative from both sides. The insistence on prayer implies that autonomous human reason does not have the capacity for the *intellectus fidei* - as surely as the *intellectus* is a *voluntaris effectus*, the *intellectus fidei* is bestowed on human reason. So even though Anselm saw that the only appropriate response to the ineffable is to try again and again to reflect upon it, to try to understand it, to grasp what is beyond our reach by strenuous effort,¹⁰⁵ he acknowledges at the same time that 'right knowledge is conditioned by the prevenient and co-operating grace of God'.¹⁰⁶ Without the *donum gratiae* the theological enterprise is doomed to failure. The *Proslogion* is therefore to be seen as a prayer-exercise for believers - it is a *pros logion* or *ad loqium* in which the soul speaks directly to God.

¹⁰⁴ *FQI*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ This is clear from these two passages in the *Monologion* in which Anselm reflects on the substance of the Supreme Nature:

... For although I would be surprised if among the names or words which we apply to things made out of nothing, there could be found [a word] that would appropriately be predicated of the Substance which created all [other] things, nevertheless I must try to ascertain what end reason will direct this investigation ... (Chapter xv).

Having now discovered so many, and such important, properties each [property] by which a certain remarkable plurality, as ineffable as it is necessary, is proved to exist in supreme oneness - I find it especially delightful to reflect more frequently upon such an impenetrable mystery ... (Chapter xliii).

¹⁰⁶ *FQI*, 41.

The above discussion has paved the way for the subject which we must now focus our attention, namely, theological methodology. Our thesis is that Barth's study of Anselm has a profound effect on his own theological method. So far, we have seen that for Anselm, faith must read and reflect upon what is said in the *Credo* in order for it to come to a self-understanding - the fundamental meaning of *intelligere* is *legere*. This is because *credere* and *intelligere*, for post-Adamic man, are not identical. The *intellectus fidei*, as we have already mentioned, requires diligence in prayer and persistence in thought on the part of the seeker. At this juncture, Barth makes an important distinction between the 'outward text' and the 'inner text'. Though this distinction is not found explicitly in Anselm, it is implicitly present in the thought of the eleventh century theologian. The outward text of the *Credo* is that which is obvious to man. But the revealed truth has an inner text. Barth explains that this inner text 'can be found in the outward text, but cannot simply be heard or read along with the outward text, for it can be heard and read along with the outward text only by virtue of a distinct intention and act and also - and this is decisive - only in virtue of special grace'.¹⁰⁷

Barth turns next to Anselm's principle of *sola ratione*. This principle is seen at work in his famous *remoto Christo* approach adopted in *Cur Deus Homo*. In the treatise, Anselm attempts to prove, by reason alone, the basis and necessity of the Incarnation and Atonement. The stress that Anselm has made on the *sole ratione* principle has resulted in the intensification in recent years, in the controversy over the question whether Anselm is a rationalist who deduces the truth of the faith from rational principle (E. Gilson) or whether his approach is intra-fideistic (Karl Barth).

¹⁰⁷ *FQI*, 41.

Stanley Kane reasons that the mature thought of Anselm, in its complexity, seems to give evidence that he is both. He is rationalistic as far as his investigative procedure and the tools he employs for analysis are concerned, and intra-fideistic in that he is dependent on the revelation. Kane concludes: 'Accordingly, the whole scheme is calculated to keep both the starting point and the results of intellectual labour within the bounds of strictest orthodoxy. Hence, the intent of his method and system as a whole is intra-fideistic'.¹⁰⁸ Barth adds that Anselm, if he was a rationalist, would have used the phrase *solitaria ratione* instead. The *sola ratione* formula must therefore be interpreted in a fideistic, non-rationalistic fashion.

Anselm calls man a *rationalis natura* - man by his rationality, has 'the capacity of forming judgements, the capacity of deciding between true and false, good and evil, etc.'¹⁰⁹ The believer, to Anselm, is this and more; in him reason is held captive in his desire for the *intellectus fidei*. In him, therefore, *ratio* is employed by *fides* in search of *intelligere*. This is the noetic *ratio*. The noetic *ratio* presupposes an ontic *ratio*, 'the *ratio* that belongs to the object of faith itself'.¹¹⁰ This ontic *ratio* is the *ratio veritatis* which is identical with the *ratio fidei* and the *ratio summae naturae*, that is, 'with the Divine Word consubstantial with the Father. It is the *ratio* of God'.¹¹¹ What then is the difference between the ontic and noetic *ratio*? Barth explains that the ontic *ratio* is 'fundamentally the same but higher than that of the noetic *ratio*' since truth is conferred upon it 'with the creation of the object of which

¹⁰⁸ Stanley Kane, '*Fides Quaerens Intellectum* in Anselm's Thought', 62.

¹⁰⁹ *FQI*, 59.

¹¹⁰ *FQI*, 45.

¹¹¹ *FQI*, 45.

it is *ratio*'. The noetic *ratio* on the other hand, is conferred 'from time to time in the event of knowing'. Thus the ontic *ratio* is that which belongs to the object of faith. It is the bearer of the *ratio veritatis* which is 'hidden in the object of faith'. This brings us back to Barth's theory of the 'inner' and 'outward' text. The former, hidden within the latter, is not at the disposal of the reader. It must be revealed to him. When this happens, the believer's faith is illumined and his 'believing *legere*' becomes *intus legere*. In this event, the believer's noetic *ratio* conforms with the ontic *ratio* of the object known - *intelligere* takes place. In this event also, the noetic *ratio* of the believer becomes, to a certain extent *vera ratio*. It becomes this only to a certain extent *vera ratio*. It becomes this only to a certain extent because, as Barth was careful to emphasise earlier, 'truth is itself the master of all *rationes* beyond the contrast between ontic and noetic, deciding for itself, now here, now there, what is *vera ratio* ...'¹¹² Shofner summarises: 'It is under the direction of this "master", then, that the believer's *ratio* is made to conform to the *ratio* of the object of faith. And, as a result, he is led along the path of the *intellectus fidei*'.¹¹³ The aim of theology is, therefore, to provide the 'proof' (*probare, probatio*) that we discussed earlier. It must be repeated here that for Anselm 'the *ratio veritatis* inherent in the Articles of the Christian *Credo* is itself at no point the subject of discussion but on the contrary it forms the self-evident basis of discussion'.¹¹⁴ Though the *probare* has a polemical-apologetic element, it should not be mistaken for, and here Barth is emphatic, the apologetic enterprise as it is currently understood and undertaken.

¹¹² *FQI*, 47.

¹¹³ Shofner, *Anselm Revisited*, 66.

¹¹⁴ *FQI*, 64.

Apologetics is only admissible if it is treated as in every way identical with the quest of the believer himself',¹¹⁵ in which case it would not be apologetics but theology. But since apologetics as we have it means for Barth 'the attempt to engage unbelief in dialogue on its own terms and outside the context of faith seeking understanding',¹¹⁶ it is poles apart from dogmatics.

As *fides quaerens intellectum*, theology is, as T. F. Torrance so brilliantly expresses it, 'the activity of the reason within the knowledge bestowed on man by God, operating within the limits of noetic investigation required by the nature of the given object'.¹¹⁷ From the initial faith given to him by God in Christ the theologian moves noetically to the 'deeper and clearer knowledge through understanding of the inner and necessary relation between the knowledge of faith and the inherent rationality of that which is believed, the very Truth and Being of God himself'.¹¹⁸ The theologian, in Anselm's and Barth's understanding, is an 'obedient creature before the Creator, who lets God be to him the One who, in his sheer objectivity as God, prescribes for men the manner and the limits of his knowing of God'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *FQI*, 67.

¹¹⁶ *Shofner*, *Anselm Revisited*, 77.

¹¹⁷ T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 182, 183.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

PART THREE

DIALOGUE:

THE CENTRE

AND

THE PERIPHERY

CHAPTER VII

KARL BARTH AND CATHOLIC ANALOGY

1. Preamble: Setting the Stage for the Dialogue

Our study of the theological epistemologies of Karl Barth and Balthasar has brought several fundamental issues to the fore. The dialogue which we shall now undertake must deal with these fundamental issues. Broadly speaking these issues have to do with revelation and theology, with theological epistemology and theological method. In dealing with these issues we are attempting to answer the fundamental question about the nature of theology, a question which can be answered only from the standpoint of revelation.

In the organisation and execution of this dialogue, we have tried to apply what appear to us to be very sound guidelines for an exercise of this nature, suggested by one of the partners in the dialogue, namely Balthasar. We concur with his cautionary note that in a Protestant-Catholic dialogue such as this one any attempt to overlook differences, to become buddies, will only compound the existing rift. There can be no open no-man's land between the two denominations. But this does not mean that the dialogue cannot be conducted with a true sense of openness on both sides, an openness which presupposes humility, but an openness that is not eager to engage in superficial irenics. We concur with von Balthasar when he said that the mistrust between Protestants and Catholics

... should not thwart the task laid on us of reaching an understanding. Protestants by definition do not accept distinctively Catholic doctrines, but that does not make them unbelievers. They still dwell in the same precincts of faith in the same Christ and are rooted and established in the same baptism. Their faith is still a trust in the same revelation; their object of faith is a common *fides* seeking *intellectus* in common.

And so Catholics will not let themselves be deflected from trying to understand their partners, despite their suspicions. But the only way of dissipating this mistrust will be to continue their own earnest search for understanding - *quaerens intellectus* - and to wait eagerly in gratitude for any spark that leads to the fire of a deeper and more vibrant understanding of the faith. A calculating spirit of reconciliation is not enough; genuine humility must be the mark of all dialogue.¹

We have nothing but admiration for the generous spirit of the author of these words and will aim to conduct this dialogue with the same openness and magnanimity.

The proposed dialogue must have as its focus what Balthasar calls 'the fundamental and formal set of theological principles that determine all the individual doctrines'.² The dialogue must not be limited to the discussion of individual doctrines and issues, even the doctrine of revelation and the problem of theological knowledge. It is precisely because this approach must be taken that this dialogue is such a difficult undertaking: the formal matters crucial to the discussion are accessible only in the material doctrines; yet the formal dimension is not the material content. 'The "principle" of theology is the content of revelation. But the content of revelation can never be cut off from the act of revealing, that is, from the God who freely and sovereignly chooses to reveal himself. And this is a dimension, therefore, of which man - even and all the more so believing man - cannot be the measure, the way he is of the principle of secular sciences'.³

What, then, is the principal issue which is responsible for creating this rift between the two theologians (and indeed, according to Barth, the two denominations)?

¹ KB, 18.

² KB, 24.

³ KB, 48-49.

The answer to this question is found in the Preface to the first volume of Barth's magisterial *Church Dogmatics*.

I can see no third alternative between the exploitation of the *analogia entis* which is legitimate only on the basis of Roman Catholicism, between the greatness and misery of the so-called natural knowledge of God in the sense of the *Vaticanum*, and a Protestant theology which draws from its own source, which stands on its own feet, and which is finally liberated from this secular misery. Hence I have no option but to say No at this point. I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of the Antichrist, and I believe that because of it it is impossible ever to become a Roman Catholic, all other reasons for not doing so being to my mind short-sighted and trivial.⁴

The rest of this chapter is an examination of Catholic analogy and Barth's objections.

2. Catholic Analogy

a. *The Definition of the Term 'Analogy'*

The term 'analogy' has a long and glorious past. It has its beginnings in the Greek language and was used by mathematicians to signify a 'proportion (i.e. a reciprocal relation between numbers or a direct similarity between them) and a proportionality (i.e. equality of ratio or agreement between two numerical relations)'.⁵ It was Plato who first emptied the term of its mathematical meaning of numerical likeness and introduced it to philosophy. Plato uses the term in several ways. Analogy is used to signify the similarity of relations or proportionality between four elements (fire/air = air/water = water/earth),⁶ between four forms of

⁴ CD I/1, viii.

⁵ Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Thought* (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1963), 1.

⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, 32c.

knowledge (knowledge/opinion = thinking/imagining)⁷ and between the two kinds of being and knowledge (being/becoming = knowledge/opinion).⁸ Plato was the first thinker to extend the use of analogy, with its duality of meaning as proportion and proportionality, to the philosophical arenas of epistemology and ontology.

In the theology of the Neo-platonists, analogy serves two fundamental purposes. Firstly, it accounts for the possibility of speaking about God. Here, with the thought of the Neo-platonists, we have the beginnings of the relationship between analogy and causality. Since God is the Cause of all things, it is argued that all created perfections can be ascribed to him. All perfections belong to God primarily and to creatures secondarily. Perfections are therefore predicated to God and to creatures analogously. Secondly, analogy provides a principle by which reality can be seen in its unity. Analogy helps man to understand reality in its various grades and degrees.⁹ The concept of analogy, which was later developed by Augustine and Aristotle, found its way into Catholic theology, where, under the influence of Thomas Aquinas, it played a prominent role.

The term analogy deals with the similarity of relations between two things. It is not *univoca*: 'the same term, applied to two different objects in the same way, designates the same thing in both of them'. Neither is it *equivoca*: 'the same term applied to two different objects, designates different thing in the one and the other'.¹⁰ It is neither parity or disparity but a partial correspondence and agreement, a

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 534a.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Mondin, *Principle*, 3-4.

¹⁰ *CD II/1*, 237.

similarity. That is to say, an analogous term is that which when applied to 'two objects, designates the same thing in both but in different ways'.¹¹

b. *Thomas Aquinas and the Analogy of Being*

Christian theologians have always been struggling with the problem of theological language. Several proposals have emerged from this reflection. Augustine believed that though God is transcendent, positive knowledge of him is still possible as the mind rises to a vision of God.¹² John Damascene, influenced by Denys, has however denied the intellect power to grasp God. In the opening paragraphs of his *De fide orthodoxa*, he wrote: 'Just as the senses can neither grasp nor perceive the things of the mind, just as corporeal form cannot lay hold of the intangible and incorporeal, by the same standard of truth beings are surpassed by the infinity beyond being, intelligences by the oneness beyond intelligence'.¹³ The apophatism of Denys means that the only appropriate approach to theological discourse is the *via negativa*.¹⁴

At first glance, Aquinas may be taken to hold the same position - a kind of

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Confessions*, 7. 9f., 18ff.

¹³ *Divine Names*, Ch. 1.

¹⁴ Consider the following passage: 'And this is the prudent and Catholic and salutary profession that is to be predicated of God: that first by the cataphatic, that is by affirmation, we predicate all things to Him, whether nouns or verbs, though not properly but in a metaphorical sense (translative); then we deny by the apophatic, that is, by negation, that He is any of the things which by cataphatic are predicated to Him, only (this time) not metaphorically but properly - for there is more truth in saying that God is not any of the things that are predicated of Him than in saying that He is'. *Periphyseon (De divisione naturae)*, ed. I. P. Sheldon Williams (Dublin 1978), I, 522. Quoted by Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 59.

agnosticism, or, at least a standpoint which superordinates the apophatic over the cataphatic. Man cannot come to know God *quid sit*, in his essence, but only *an sit* or *quod sit*, in his existence. But this must be understood in the context of his broader philosophical and theological framework which he sets out in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*: 'the divine substance exceeds by its immensity every form which our intellect attains, and so we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is, but we have some notion of it by coming to know what it is not'.¹⁵ Thus in the tradition of Denys, Pseudo-Dionysius, and those influenced by Neo-platonism, Aquinas is advocating the *via negativa*. Created substance is defined by first assigning it to its genus through which we generally know its nature, and distinguish it from other things. God, however, transcends all genera and cannot be assigned a genus. This means that God cannot be distinguished from other things by the process of positive differentiations (*per affirmativas differentias*). We can, however, attain some notion of God's nature by the process of negative differentiations. This does not mean that the predicates are denied of God because he does not possess the perfection expressed in the predicate. Rather, God infinitely exceeds that limited perfection in richness, so that, when we say that God is not corporeal, we do not by this mean that God is less than body, but that he is more than body, possessing none of the limitations involved in being a corporeal substance. The ontological foundation for Aquinas' theological epistemology is furnished by a theory of causality. Since the world is caused by God, knowledge of the world can lead to the knowledge of God. But since as uncaused Cause God transcends the world and is not himself a sensible object, we must deny him of all predicates which are bound up with corporeality.

¹⁵ I.14.

For Aquinas, however, the apophatic must be balanced with the cataphatic. The former is not emphasised to the exclusion of the latter. Though the negative predicates or names are, by their very form, associated with the negative way, there are positive predicates or names which, instead of removing or denying something from the divine substance, are predicated positively or affirmatively to the divine substance. To put it rather differently, when we talk of God we do not always say what he is not. When we say, for instance, that God is 'good' and 'wise', we speak positively or affirmatively. Two important observations may be made at this point regarding Aquinas' understanding of the use of positive predicates to the divine substance. Firstly, positive predicates cannot be interpreted in purely causal terms. That is to say, positive predicates, when predicated to the divine substance, say something about the substance itself. This position is at variance with the one held by Maimonides who opines that a statement like 'God is good' simply means that God causes good things. Aquinas asserts that the statement is a positive affirmation made concerning the divine substance.¹⁶In other words, it describes God. Secondly, none of the positive statements describes God perfectly. Our intellect can know God only through sensible objects. Since these objects are poor and imperfect reflections of the divine substance, our knowledge and concepts of God are, by consequence, imperfect and to a large extent, inadequate. Thus when we say that God is 'good' and 'wise' we mean that in him is to be found goodness and wisdom which far exceeds and excludes all the imperfections and limitations of creatures. The creature therefore

¹⁶ 'Since, as our faith teaches and as Maimonides also grants, creatures have not always existed, it follows [on account] that we could not say that God was wise or good before the existence of creatures. For it is evident that before creatures existed he did nothing as regards his effects, neither as good or as wise'. *ST* 1a. 13. 1 ad. 1.

represents God, who, as its Cause, transcends it infinitely.

We speak of God as we know Him, and since we know Him from creatures we can only speak of Him as they represent Him. Any creature, in so far as it possess any perfection represents God and is like Him, for He, being simply and universally perfect has pre-existing in Himself the perfections of all his creatures.¹⁷

Herbert McCabe describes Aquinas' understanding of the relationship between cause and effect and its epistemological implications as follows.

St Thomas' whole theory of causal explanation is based on the idea that things have certain natures and that having these natures they have certain activities which are natural to them. When you know what something is you already know what it is likely to do - it is indeed the same thing fully to understand the nature of a thing and to know what it will naturally do ... Thus a causal explanation is one in terms of the natural behaviour of things. When you have found the cause there is no further question about why this cause should produce this effect, to understand the cause is just to understand that it naturally produces this effect.¹⁸

Following the above argument we could therefore say that as regards to *what* is predicated ('goodness' and 'wisdom', for example), the positive predicate used in relation to God is without defect, whereas the *manner* of predicating it is defective and deficient since it involves something which is perceived by the human intellect. Thus predicates of this kind may be both affirmed and denied of God. Here Aquinas' thought is consonant with Denys'. Brian Davies explains.

According to Denys, when we say that God is not thus and so, we are not asserting that it is simply or unqualifiably false that he is thus and so. His view is that negations concerning God must themselves, in a sense, be negated. For, as we have seen, he holds that God can be 'named' from everything (compared to anything) because he is the creator of everything. This, in turn, leads him to be fond of the prefix 'hyper' ('above'). We may deny that God is good, but not in order baldly to assert, 'It is not the case that God is good', for we may say,

¹⁷ *ST* 1a. 13.2.

¹⁸ *God Matters* (London 1987), 101.

‘God is hyper-good’, meaning that his goodness transcends the goodness of created things while at the same time being reflected in that.¹⁹

Further clarifications are needed to understand Aquinas’ concept of the nature of theological language. In the first place, it must be said that theological language is both analogical and literal. For example, when we say that Solomon and God are wise, we are using the word ‘wise’ in two different but related ways. But both uses are literal. That is to say, both Solomon and God are *really* wise. One would misunderstand Aquinas if one took him to say that our talk of God is entirely metaphorical. ‘Not all words are used of God metaphorically’, he writes, ‘some are used literally’.²⁰ Secondly, the words that are used for both God and creature are applied *primarily* to God and *derivatively* of creatures.²¹ The question is: ‘Do we really know what we mean when we say that “God is wise”?’ We certainly do know the meaning of the statement ‘Solomon is wise’, but can we say the same about the statement ‘God is wise’? To put it in another way, what is the epistemology of the analogy of being? Aquinas explains in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* that our knowledge of God is derived from our knowledge of the world: ‘the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to the mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority. And so he is said to be named from his effects’.²² So once again we come to the theory of causality, and the Thomist notion, so brilliantly explained by McCabe, that the cause is known by its

¹⁹ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas*, 72.

²⁰ *ST* 1a. 13.3.

²¹ *ST* 1a. 13.7.

²² *CG* I:34.

effect. As effect, the world resembles its Cause so that it is possible to come to the knowledge of the Cause through the objective reality of the effect. Analogical predication is founded on this static notion of resemblance. Barth, as we shall see, has much to say in criticism of this notion of God's relationship with the world which automatically guarantees theological knowledge. To be sure, this view does emphasise that this resemblance and likeness is one way. That is to say, creatures resemble God - it would be inappropriate to say that God is like the creature. This view also emphasises that creatures resemble God imperfectly, so that in the analogy of being, one is confronted with a similarity within an ever greater dissimilarity. Nonetheless this view presupposes a very optimistic view of the noetic capabilities of the perceiver, since the mind or the intellect of the perceiving subject is able to penetrate beyond the surface of the thing perceived.

Now Aquinas distinguishes the analogy of proportion and proportionality, and we must pause briefly to examine these distinctions before moving on to discuss Barth's objections. By the analogy of proportions Aquinas means that analogy in which a predicate is applied to one analogue primarily, namely God, and another secondarily, namely the creature, on the basis of their real relation and likeness. Aquinas sometimes calls this the analogy of attribution. As we have observed earlier, the perfections attributed to each analogue are really present in them, albeit in different ways. The analogy of proportionality can be used in two ways, symbolically and properly. For example, we can speak of God as 'Sun', when we wish to speak of his glory and splendour, so that what the sun is to the bodily eye, God is to the soul. In this case we are speaking symbolically. But an analogy can also be drawn between God's intellectual activity and man's. And since in this case intellectual

activity is pure perfection, we are not here speaking symbolically but properly.

3. Barth's Objection To Catholic Analogy

a. *Analogy of Being as Grundprinzip of Catholic Theology*

Now what has Barth to say to all this? Barth identified the *analogia entis* as the *Grundprinzip* of Catholic theology. Accordingly he rejects Catholic analogy, calling it the invention of the anti-christ, since it militates against the revelation of God, confuses theological discourse, and relativises theological knowledge. The *analogia entis* provides a philosophical and metaphysical foundation upon which the super-structure of Roman Catholic theology is erected. It is the fertile soil which nourishes the natural theology of the *Vaticanum*. The analogy of being is not only the *point de départ* of Roman Catholic theology but its dominating and governing principle. Balthasar has denied these allegations made by Barth and has come to the defence of Roman Catholic theology in general and the analogy of being in particular. Catholic theology, he says, does not begin with a preconceived metaphysical system, but with revelation. The analogy of being, he argues, is necessary. As we have already seen, the analogy of being is for him the only way in which theology can work responsibly between the philosophies of identity and absolute otherness.

b. *Knowledge of God in abstracto*

The inner rationality of the analogy of being proceeds from the premise, spelt out by the Vatican, that God is known or knowable *in abstracto*, that is, apart from his direct activity in the world. Its first concern is to establish the existence of God as Creator, the beginning and end of all things. It then decides from this that God is

knowable - knowable even without his revelation. In other words, the knowability of God is based, not on God's activity in the world, but on the 'being of God abstractly understood'.²³ Being is also ascribed to man, although in a different way. The philosophical category of 'being' is now the neutral ground or concept in which both God and man are bracketed. The ascription of being to both God and man, albeit in infinite qualitative disparity, means that an analogy between the two subjects is established on the concept of being: hence we have the *analogia entis*: 'the idea of being in which God and man are always comprehended together even if their relationship to being is quite different, and even if they have a quite different part in being'.²⁴ What this essentially means is that man can come to the knowledge of God quite apart from his revelation.

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As himself a being, man is able to know a being as such. But if this is so, then in principle he is able to know all being, even God as the incomparably real being. Therefore if God is, and if we cannot deny His being, or on the other hand, our own being and that of creation, necessarily we must affirm His knowability apart from His revelation. For it consists precisely in this analogy of being which comprehends both Him and us.²⁵

The *analogia entis* must be assessed from another angle as well. We have already alluded to the fact that Thomist analogy is founded on the theory of causality. Now Barth is aware of the fact that Protestant orthodoxy also uses the concept of *causa* to describe the relationship between God and the world. Indeed he does not reject the concept or its language. To be sure, it is legitimate to describe God as *causa* in the sense that he is primarily and supremely the source of all *causae*, the

²³ CD II/1, 81.

²⁴ CD II/1, 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

basis and therefore starting point of the whole causal series, so long as this does not lead to a mechanistic interpretation of the way things are and of the relationship between God and the world. Creation is *causa* only in virtue of the fact that it is absolutely posited by God. Its *causare* is a participation of the divine *causare*. But it would be a mistake to treat *causa* as a master-concept to which both God and creature are its subjects.²⁶ *Causa* is not a genus of which both divine and creaturely *causae* are species. It must not be seen as a common denominator under which the two can be placed. When this is done, theology is turned into philosophy, with the theory of causality as the total scheme of things. The Christological control of the use of *causa* here is paramount - with the divine and human natures of Christ we are not dealing with two species in the one genus, nature. A Christology which argues for this and works from this premise is defective. This Christology legitimises the use of concepts like 'being' and 'nature' as master-concepts to articulate the relationship between God and the world.

Indeed, it would be a mistake to try to compare them simply because they are both *causa*. In the same way it would be a mistake to argue as follows. The Creator exists and has being no less than the creature. Therefore although the being of the Creator and the creature is unlike, in some respects they are like and therefore similar. There is therefore an *analogia entis* between God and the creature. To that extent there is a master-concept, a common denominator, a genus (being) which comprises both God and the creature. And it would really be a serious mistake if we were to adopt this argument. Jesus Christ has a divine nature and human. Therefore, although the two natures are unlike, they are also alike and similar. There is therefore an *analogia naturae* between God and man. And to that extent we can speak of a master concept, a common denominator, a genus (nature) which comprises both God and man. This is the type of mistake which we have to avoid at this point. This is the deduction which we have to recognise as false

²⁶ CD II/1, 102.

and therefore illegitimate.²⁷

Human and divine subjects are such that they are unlike. They are subjects which are antithetical to each other and in their antithesis they cannot be compared. Barth stresses again and again the qualitative difference between God and the world, which is relativised by the *analogia entis*.²⁸ Thus just as there cannot be for Barth an *analogia entis* because of the qualitative difference between God and the world, there can also be no *analogia causae* on the same ground and for the same reason.²⁹

But there is still another angle to Barth's objection to the analogy of being which we must examine. The *Vaticanum*'s concept of the knowledge of God has introduced, as it were, a partitioning of God. To be sure, the *Vaticanum* does not wish to speak about only a part of God - the partitioning of the knowledge of God in

²⁷ CD II/1, 103.

²⁸ Consider the following passages:

'To put it rather differently, it must be clearly understood that when the word *causa* is applied to God on the one side and the creature on the other, the concept does not describe both active subjects, and it does not signify subjects which are merely not alike, or not similar, but subjects which in their absolute antithesis cannot even be compared' (CD II/1, 102).

'We cannot deduce from the fact that both subjects are *causa* the further fact that they fall under the one master-concept *causa* ... On the contrary, they cannot even be compared' (CD II/1, 103).

'The divine and creaturely subjects are not like or similar, but unlike. They are unlike because their basis and constitution as subjects are quite different and therefore absolutely unlike, that is, there is not even the slightest similarity between them' (CD III/1, 103).

²⁹ Barth however does speak of a correspondence between the activity of the Creator and creature, a correspondence not on the basis of identity but similarity and comparableness, and therefore analogy. This likeness and unlikeness, however, is established on the basis of the *analogia operationis* or *analogia relationis*.

its procedure is, in the final analysis, provisional. Be that as it may, this partitioning with regard to the knowability of God has inevitably led, according to Barth, to the partitioning of the one God as well. God is first known as *rerum omnium principium et finis* before he is known as Creator. But God, the God of the Scriptures, is more than this. He is also God the Reconciler and Redeemer. The natural theology of the *Vaticanum* has undermined the unity of God. We have to take this unity very seriously not only in theory but in practice, says Barth. When we speak of God the creator we must keep in mind that he is Redeemer and Reconciler, and when we speak of him as Redeemer, we must bear in mind that he is Creator. This, Barth argues, is characteristic of the way the Bible speaks of God: 'even when it speaks of God the Lord and of the Creator, it also speaks of the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of the Yahweh of the history of Israel, of the God who forgives sins and is his people's salvation'.³⁰ In the light of this Barth questions the claim of the knowledge of God that is made in abstraction - 'Are we really speaking of the one true God even if provisionally we think of only one side of God - in this instance God the Lord and Creator?'³¹

4. An Alternative Approach: The Analogy of Faith

a. *Origins of Barth's Concept of Analogy*

It is difficult to trace the various influences that resulted in Barth's analogical thinking. We have already noted two pivotal points in Barth's intellectual development: his abandonment of liberalism to embrace the dialectical method, which

³⁰ *CD* II/1, 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*

resulted in the celebrated *Römerbrief*, and his discovery of Anselm, which revolutionised his understanding of theology. It is here, in the latter stage, that Barth moved beyond the dialectical method to analogy. *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, then, may be seen to represent the history of Barth's second decisive turning point - his shift from dialecticism to the *analogia fidei*.³² Barth saw that analogy is the only method proper to the theologian if he wishes to come to an understanding of the relationship between God and the world, and the content of Revelation.

Although it is difficult to trace the evolution of Barth's thought from liberalism to analogical thinking, several fundamental influences can be seen to be possible resources that might have shaped his thinking. We have already mentioned the fact that Barth's study of Anselm is the historical starting point of this movement towards analogical thinking. The doctrine of the Reformers, namely, 'justification by faith alone', has no doubt a very important role in Barth's thinking. There is a sense in which this dialogue is the re-enactment of Luther's debate with the *via moderna*, except that the emphasis in this case is on epistemology instead of soteriology. The Kierkegaardian emphasis of the qualitative difference between time and eternity is also a key element in Barth's analogical thinking. Barth's Christocentric approach, which applies the Platonic concept of *logos* as the '*a priori Uranalogans*' resulting in the notion of Christ as the archetype of all analogies, makes his doctrine of analogy not just a new argument against the Catholic notion of the *analogia entis*, but a new creation in theology.³³

³² See Battista Mondin, *Principle*, 148.

³³ Hence Pöhlmann could say, '*Dies analogia fidei Barth's ist eine theologische Neuschöpfung*'. Cf. Hans Georg Pöhlmann, *Analogia entis oder Analogia fidei?: Die Frage der Analogie bei Karl Barth* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1965);

b. *Barth's Use of Analogy*

It is helpful, in attempting to understand Barth's use of analogy in theology to begin with his general position regarding the definition and purpose of theology. Theology (more precisely, dogmatic theology), Barth asserts again and again, is the 'self-examination of the Christian Church in respect of the content of its distinctive talk about God'.³⁴ As such, the criterion for dogmatics is the Word of God, since, only when and to the extent to which the Word of God is spoken by God himself to the Church can there be theological discourse, which is the task of theology. In this way, theology, for Barth, is always *theologia crucis*. That is to say, it is always an act of obedience which is certain in faith. It follows then, that the purpose of theology is to test 'the coherence of present-day proclamation with the original and prevailing essence of the Church'.³⁵

From the outset, Barth establishes very clearly the boundaries which define theology and theological discourse. In keeping with the older Protestant theology, Barth speaks about the centrality of the Word of God in his dogmatic prologomena. Barth's understanding of the authority of the Word of God is materially similar to the older Protestant Theology's assertion of the authority and normativeness of Holy Scripture as the presupposition of the Church's speech about God. Though Barth does not in fact deny that there can be a philosophical theory of theological language, his suspicion of natural theology in general led him to think that any philosophical

Quoted by Jung Young Lee, 'Karl Barth's Use of Analogy in His *Church Dogmatics*', *SJT* 22 (1969), 129-151.

³⁴ *CD* I/1, 11.

³⁵ *CD* I/1, 56.

solution to the problem of theological language is false.³⁶ Barth's discussion of the problem of theological language is consequently a theological and not philosophical discussion.

From this premise, it is not difficult to see why Barth concludes that the concept of analogy that is capable of understanding God and his revelation is the *analogia fidei* which he defines as 'the correspondence (in faith) of the thing with the knowing, of the object with the thought, of the word of God with the word of man in thought and speech'.³⁷ Here Barth finds a tool which enables him to communicate the dialectical relationship between God and the world which he tries in vain to articulate in his commentary on Romans. Barth's reflection on the use of analogy in theology is found in *CD* II/1. He begins by asking a basic question about the content and meaning of words that are used to describe the creature and God: 'Does there exist a simple parity of content and meaning when we apply the same word to the creature on the one hand and to God's revelation and God on the other?'³⁸ Barth replies in the negative. For to affirm that there is a parity in the content and meaning of words applied to God and the creature would mean a denial of the hiddenness of God and the necessity of his revelation. It would mean that God has ceased to be God or that man has become a God. But does this mean that we ought then to speak of a disparity of content and meaning when we apply a description to the creature and God? To affirm this would be equally wrong. It would lead to 'an all too human

³⁶ See *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (Gifford Lectures 1938), 4-5.

³⁷ *CD* I/1, 279.

³⁸ *CD* II/1, 224.

exaggeration of that awe in the knowledge of God by which we do not praise God but deny Him'.³⁹ We see here Barth's opposition to the apophatism of mystical theology, which exaggerates the disparity to the point that all concepts and speech of God are denied. This kind of disparity, Barth points out, actually means that we do not know God. The middle way is the way of analogy. Again, we see Barth beginning here not with the possibility of theological knowledge, but with its actuality. In this Barth is always consistent.

The fact that we know Him must mean that, with our views, concepts and words, we do not describe and express something quite different from Himself, but that in and by these means of ours - the only ones we have - we describe and express God himself ... In this perplexity the older theology accepted the concept of analogy to describe the fellowship [that is, the fellowship between the knower and the known] in question. By this term both the false thesis of parity and the equally false thesis of disparity were attacked and destroyed, but the elements of truth in both were revealed.⁴⁰

Thus analogy, according to Barth, is necessary and unavoidable in theology. How does this analogy arise? Barth is careful to stress that it does not arise because of the imposition by man. Rather it arises out of God's choice, that is to say, from his revelation. Theological discourse is grounded in God's revelation, and because this is so, because God has in his revelation given us permission as the result of which our views, concepts and words can be legitimately and genuinely applied to him, theological discourse is possible and our work can be successful. Analogy is not the deification of man and his word. In using this mode of language we are not trusting in the intrinsic qualities in man or in his words, which gives him the power of apprehension and ensures the immanent correctness of his words when they are

³⁹ *CD* II/1, 225.

⁴⁰ *CD* II/1, 225.

applied to God. According to Barth, theological discourse can only follow the encounter between God and man which is precipitated entirely by God. Our knowledge, and therefore our speech about God cannot precede this encounter. The analogy of faith is therefore based on the unilateral relationship between God and the creature.

Now although Barth does not systematically deal with the various traditional uses of analogy, it is obvious that he is familiar with them and sometimes mentions them in the course of his discussion. Barth rejects the *analogia inequalitatis*, since it does not properly treat the transcendence of God and tends towards pantheism. The *analogia proportionalitatis* is also rejected. The analogy of proportionality is a mode of predication which signifies the quantitative correspondence between two beings. This correspondence is understood algebraically, so that there is a plus and minus on both sides, a correspondence which partially exists and partially does not exist. Barth rejects this understanding of analogy as improper for theology: ‘... this kind of algebraic division - and any division that we know and can make is an algebraic division of this kind - is quite out of the question as between God and ourselves’.⁴¹ The only form of analogy which he accepts and uses is the *analogia attributionis*. Now the analogy of attributions can be of two types. The first, which he rejects, is the *analogia intrinsecae*, which may be understood as a form of predication which signifies a similarity which belongs intrinsically to the *analogans* and the *analogatum*, although to the latter only secondarily and *per dependentiam*. The second type is the *analogia extrinsecae* where the analogy of the creature ‘which is proper to the creature only externally in the existence and form of its relationship to the *analogans*,

⁴¹ CD II/1, 234.

that is, to God'.⁴² The reason for this is clear: the attribution to a creature of a perfection which belongs primarily to God is made possible only by Revelation; the creature cannot be placed on the same level with God. In this sense Barth's analogy of faith is also sometimes called the *analogia relationis*.

c. *Analogy and the Problem of Language*

We turn now to the problem of theological semantics. The main problem of theological semantics is stated clearly by Battista Mondin: 'Human language is drawn from the material world and is made to deal with material objects, with the world of phenomena. On what ground is the theologian justified to extend language to speak about God, who transcends the material world, and is not himself a phenomenon?'⁴³ Aquinas uses the theories of being and causality to deal with this problem. Barth, in opposition to the approaches of Aquinas, answers the question from the standpoint of God's revelation. Indeed, for Barth, the question can be answered only from that standpoint. There can be no knowledge of God or speech about God outside Revelation. Our views, concepts and words corresponds to God only on the basis of this revelation. Barth's concept of the analogy of faith is therefore firmly rooted in the superior principle of the *sola fide*. Thus, in order for this correspondence to be established, in order for there to be an analogy between our concepts, views and words and their object, 'God has to make himself object to us in the grace of his revelation'.⁴⁴ God bestows truth upon our knowing which is directed to creaturely

⁴² CD II/1, 238.

⁴³ Mondin, *Principle*, 155.

⁴⁴ CD II/1, 231.

objects, a truth that has similarity with him.

The next thing that Barth says here is of great import: 'Without this bestowal our words have truth in him but not in us. In our mouths they are words which denote the creatures but not God'.⁴⁵ It is here that the doctrine of analogy in natural theology has erred. It has misconceived the becoming as being, the actuality of God's revelation as something which exists and is capable of proof without revelation, the knowledge of faith as the knowledge of unaided reason. It is this static idea of the analogy between our word and God, which is derived from the Thomist theory of causality and from it the static notion of resemblance that we examined earlier, which Barth repudiates. This static and automatic correspondence between cause and effect so that the cause may be known by its effect, militates against the fact that God can only be known by God, that is, by his revelation. 'We have no grounds for saying No where God has said Yes in his revelation. But it all depends upon our saying Yes where - and only where - God has first said Yes in his revelation'.⁴⁶

Let us return to the statement we cited at the beginning of the last paragraph. Barth said that without this special bestowal of God by grace our words have 'truth in him but not in us'. In these words we have before us the ontology and epistemology of Barth's concept of analogy. We will deal with these matters in detail in the next two sections. The point we wish to make at this juncture in reference to the above statement is that though man does not have the power to extend his language to God. God has given human language the power to talk about him. Barth has here combined the principle of man's omniscience to know God apart from

⁴⁵ *CD* II/1, 231.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

his revelation, and therefore the corresponding incapability to extend his language to God, and the *fact* that human language has been extended to talk about God. But this possibility comes from God alone.

It is to be noted that the human word receives concrete content and concrete form from God, and becomes capable of saying, by the fact, and only by the fact, that it is spoken on the strength of God's permission and command, and by God's revelation, and is not arbitrarily discovered and affirmed.⁴⁷

The fallacy fabricated by the doctrine of analogy in natural theology is the affirmation of all analogies, in the most arbitrary fashion, on the basis of God's omnipotence. True proclamation, for Barth, does not work on this false concept of freedom. True proclamation, and *ipso facto* scientific theology, must speak particularly and restrictedly.

To understand this further, we shall examine Barth's theology of language. Here four cardinal points must be made. The first is that human language has its origin in God. God creates language for himself, and as such the human word is not the property of man but of God. Hence the words 'father' and 'son' do not first have their truth in our thought and language. Barth explains that '[t]hey have it first and properly at a point to which, as our words, they cannot refer at all, but to which, on the basis of the grace of the revelation of God, they may refer, and on the basis of the lawful claim of God the Creator they even must refer, and therefore, on the basis of this permission and compulsion, they can actually refer - in their application to God, in the doctrine of the Trinity'.⁴⁸ This means that God is *the* Father and *the* Son in a way incomprehensible and concealed from us. The words 'Father' and 'Son' have

⁴⁷ CD II/1, 32.

⁴⁸ CD II/1, 229.

their origin and therefore their true meaning in God, which shows the incontestable priority of the Creator over the creature. This is the same for words like 'patience' and 'love'. The former does not have to do with the virtue that we practise or fail to practise. It is supremely the incomprehensible being and attitude of God which is shown in the fact that he allows us time to repent and believe in him. The latter, as desire which surpasses natural self-seeking of the one for the other, is rooted in the trinitarian *perichoresis*, of the ineffable love that the Father has for the Son, and the Son has for the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, man can extend his language to God only because God has already used human language for himself. Again this application is not on account of man's own ingenuity or intrinsic qualities, but the fact that God has given him permission. That is to say, through his revelation, God has authorised and indeed commanded man to speak thus and so about him. Clarity in this can be obtained when we separate what seems to be an overlapping of two arguments. The first is that human language is analogous to God's language because it is an imitation of the latter; the other argument is God as Creator of human language is its Lord. God can, and in fact has commanded man to use his language for God. But the point to be made here is that in his revelation God restricts man's use of language. Man can neither take up the analogies by himself nor abandon them, for to do this is to take his stand elsewhere than where the Word of God is heard.⁴⁹ Thirdly, man can extend his language to God because the meanings of his words are first and fully realised only in God. The word 'person' is a good example. The question is not whether God is a person but whether we are persons. And finally, man can extend his language to God because

⁴⁹ CD I/1, 153.

it has been sanctified by Christ and the Church. Just as Christ sanctifies man and establishes his church, so also he sanctifies human language and transforms it into the language that is suitable for God.

d. Analogy and the Problem of Knowledge

The analogy of faith presupposes the inability of man to come to the knowledge of God by himself. Man cannot know God unless God has given himself to be known in his revelation.⁵⁰ Thus for Barth, we possess no analogies on the basis of which the nature and being of God as the Lord, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer can be accessible to us.⁵¹ We know about God as Lord, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, 'not because we also know other lords and lordships. It is not even partly because of this previous knowledge and partly because of God's revelation. It is because of God's revelation alone'.⁵² Only revelation provides man with true concepts and speech about God.

To the question how we come to know God by means of our thinking and language, we must give the answer that of ourselves we do not come to know him, that, on the contrary, this happens only as grace of revelation of God comes to us and therefore to the means of our thinking and language, adopting us and them, pardoning, saving, protecting and making good. We are permitted to make use, and a successful use at that, of the means given to us. We do not create this success. Nor do our means create it. But the grace of God's revelation creates it. To know this is the awe in which our knowledge of God becomes true.⁵³

⁵⁰ CD I/1, 153.

⁵¹ CD II/1, 75-77.

⁵² CD II/1, 76.

⁵³ CD II/1, 223.

Through this relationship of divine encounter, God, through the grace of his revelation 'lowers himself to be known by us according to the measure of our own human cognition'.⁵⁴ In this process, our thinking and language becomes, as it were empty shells which God fills with his Word. In this way, through the analogy of faith, God as he is in himself is really known. At this juncture, we recall our discussion in chapter IV of the divine and human sides of the encounter. When God gives himself in his revelation, man becomes the object of God. The divine side of this encounter is that God, who is himself the truth, gives himself to be known as truth by his Word and through his Spirit. Man participates in God's truth through the divine good-pleasure. This participation cannot be based on man's independent nature and activity. His readiness for this encounter which corresponds with God's readiness for man cannot be grounded in itself - it is based on the prior and supreme readiness of God, beside which there can ultimately be no second.

Finally, our language speaks about God analogously in the sense that it does not express God openly but hiddenly. This is because our human language will always retain its worldliness, even when God takes it to himself. Here, in agreement with Aquinas, Barth speaks of the disparity between form and content. The form of the analogy, which is the mode of signification, is human, and therefore defective and deficient; while the content of it is God himself.⁵⁵

Analogous concepts have a worldly form, the form of all sorts of human acts, and this form is the veiling of the divine content, the calling of it in question. There is no experience of the Word of God other than this problematic form so deeply grounded in the facts. As in analogous language, so too in analogous concepts, there is

⁵⁴ *CD* II/1, 61.

⁵⁵ *CD* I/1, 159.

contradiction and radical conflict between form and content. Because of this contradiction man can never arrive at a direct encounter with the content through the form of his concepts.⁵⁶

There can be no direct communication between the two interiorities. God objectifies himself through the object of the world, which remain as worldly objects, and yet are set aside and therefore different from other worldly objects, graced by God's presence. It is in the worldliness of these concepts and forms that God objectifies himself and is therefore known. There is therefore a partial correspondence, but this correspondence is from God's side only, known by faith in his revelation.

e. Analogy and the Problem of Ontology

Does Barth's analogy of faith presuppose an analogy of being? Many are of the opinion that it does. Balthasar, as we have seen, has argued in this way. Barth's analogy of faith, when interpreted christologically presupposes the idea of *analogia entis*, since the centre must have a periphery. This same judgement is made by Mondin, Hamer and Van Til.⁵⁷ Barth does not deny the ontological presupposition of the analogy of faith, but locates this ontology, not in a general theory of being, but in the concrete being of the God-Man in Jesus Christ. For it is only in Jesus Christ that one can come to understand the correspondence between the being of God and man, a correspondence which takes place in the context of an infinite qualitative difference. 'The humanity of Jesus, his fellow-humanity, his being for man as the direct correlative of his being for God, indicates, attests and reveals this

⁵⁶ Mondin, *Principle*, 163.

⁵⁷ See Mondin, *Principle*, 172; Jerome Hamer, *Karl Barth* (London: Sand & Co. Ltd., 1962), 70; and Cornelius van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1962), 70.

correspondence and similarity'.⁵⁸

The analogical relationship of Christology is the most important aspect of Barth's thinking. It is explored at three different levels. At the first level there is the analogous relation between Christ and God which is the very basis and prototype of God's relation to man. '[T]he fact that from all eternity God pitied and received man, the grounding of the fellow-humanity of Jesus in the eternal covenant executed in time in his being for man, rests on the freedom of God in which there is nothing arbitrary or accidental but in which God is true to himself'.⁵⁹ The intra-trinitarian life points to a perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Father and Son, which constitutes the proto-type of the I-Thou relationship. In this way, the relationship which God through Christ establishes with humanity *ad extra* is not foreign but proper and natural to him: 'He is the original source of every I and Thou, of the I which is eternally from and to the Thou and therefore supremely I'.⁶⁰ The I-Thou relationship in the inner-life of the Trinity, which is characterised by mutual love, is the final and decisive ground upon which the ontological character of the reality of the radicality of Jesus' being for man is founded: 'The eternal love in which God as the Father is loved by the Son and as the Son by the Father, is also the love which is addressed by God to man'.⁶¹

Secondly, there is a correspondence, and therefore analogy, between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. The divinity means that he is from God and

⁵⁸ CD III/2, 220.

⁵⁹ CD III/2, 218.

⁶⁰ CD III/2, 218.

⁶¹ CD III/2, 220.

goes to God, while his humanity means that he is from the cosmos and returns to the cosmos. But God is not the cosmos, and the cosmos is not God. Only in Jesus Christ, then, can the correspondence or similarity between God and the world be conceived, amidst a greater dissimilarity and dialecticism. This analogous relationship, Barth maintains, is essential, since Christ 'could not be for God if he were not on that account for man'.⁶²

Thirdly, there is an analogy between humanity in general and Christ's humanity. Notwithstanding all differences, the humanity of Jesus has some fundamental commonalities with humanity in general, since this is the inevitable presupposition when one nature is for another nature. Otherwise, it would be idle to speak of Jesus and man as 'man'.

If the humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is for other men, this means that for all the disparity between him and us he affirms these others as beings which are not merely unlike him in his creaturely existence and therefore his humanity, but also like him in some basic form.⁶³

Furthermore, if the 'man' Jesus is to be for, from and to other 'men', that is to say, if he is to be the Saviour of 'men' and their Representative, to speak otherwise about the humanity of Christ would be quite impossible.

The *analogia relationis* is also connected to Barth's understanding of the *Imago Dei* as the relationship between man and woman which, by grace, mirrors divine relationality. We have discussed this in some detail in the last chapter, and there is no need to repeat it here. What is of moment for us at this point is the fact that for Barth, the image of God in man does not have to do with any qualities that are found

⁶² CD III/1, 217.

⁶³ CD III/2, 223.

in man; it is conceived purely in relational terms. In other words, with the *Imago Dei*, we are dealing not with an *analogia entis* but an *analogia relationis*, and hence an *analogia gratia* and an *analogia fidei*. The image of God in man, understood in this way shows that it is at the same time similar to and different from the prototype. It is similar in the sense that the I-Thou relationship of the Father and Son corresponds with the I-Thou relationship of man and woman. The dissimilarity lies in the fact that in the latter, this relationship takes place between different individuals, whereas in the former it takes place within the same unique *individuum*.

From the above discussion, it should now become quite clear that Barth's *analogia fidei* is established on the basis of a dynamic relationship rather than on a static concept of being. Barth's rejection of the *analogia entis* then can be conceived as the rejection of a static ontology. Barth's radical ontology is founded on the theological conception that God's being is a becoming. Put differently, 'God is who he is in his works'.⁶⁴ To be sure, he is not bound to his works. Rather they are bound to him. But in and through his works, God is himself revealed as the One he is, so that in order for us to understand him, we must understand him only as the One he is in his works. Revelation therefore does not remain silent about the being of God. As God's particular act, revelation is an event and an actuality in which God truly presents himself to us. But because God's revelation is God's act, '[e]very statement of what God is, and explanation how God is, must always state and explain what and how he is in his act and decision. There is no moment in the ways of God which is over and above this decision'.⁶⁵ The implications of this for Barth's understanding of the

⁶⁴ CD II/1, 260.

⁶⁵ CD II/1, 272.

basis of theological language, and thus the ontology of the analogy of relations is expressed lucidly by Colin Gunton.

Because revelation is God taking place, rational theology is forced to the conclusion that his being consists in his becoming ... [God] authenticates his existence in threefold revelation events, and thus imposes a certain kind of language upon the interpreter of those events. Once the revelatory character of the events is acknowledged, the interpreter has to speak of God in a certain way, though not with the rigidly prescribed linguistic circle of the rationalist. Theological language becomes open-textured, the limits of the openness being prescribed not by language but by the nature of the object of theology. Analogous predication is both made possible and given its limits by revelation.⁶⁶

The question that needs to be addressed here is whether Barth is right to replace the static ontology with his dynamic and actualistic understanding of God's relationship with the world. Barth has described God as event. Is it conceivable and correct that God should be so described? H. G. Pöhlmann objects to Barth's actualism for two fundamental reasons. The first is that there is, according to Pöhlmann, a static thread underlying the dynamism of the Bible's concept of God. The second is that Barth's actualism has endangered the ontological distinction between God and the world, and has resulted in an arbitrariness in God's activity. These objections must indeed be taken seriously, as they have to do with the basis of Barth's analogical thinking. We have found Gunton's response to these objections instructive.

Three points are made in answer to this objection to Barth's actualism. The first deals with the question of whether there can be discerned in the Bible, a static thread which runs beneath its concept of God. Much depends on how one conceives of the creation, the Incarnation and the cross. Can they be seen as events, that is to say, as things that happen? The created order can certainly be understood this way -

⁶⁶ Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 152-153.

as that which happens as a result of God's will and word. Barth's actualism can compromise the ontological distinction between God and creation. Any such conception could. But when Barth's actualism is seen alongside his theology of creation, there can be no doubt that Barth is careful to avoid this danger. Secondly, concerning the charge that Barth's actualism results in arbitrariness in the being of God, it appears here that Pöhlmann has either misunderstood or missed the fact that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity relates the temporal divine reality to God's eternity. 'In so doing', Gunton points out, 'he makes precisely the same error as those who accuse Barth of failing to do his ontological homework'.⁶⁷ It does appear that Pöhlmann is attempting to reinstate an Aristotelian conceptuality of being. He opines that in it is to be found a middle way between what he calls the Parmenidean substantialism and Heraclatean actualism. But, as Gunton astutely points out, in the Aristotelian conceptuality of being, we do not have a mere static thread, but rather a 'substantial' analogy which describes what God really is in himself. As such it is hardly the middle way at all.

The third and final concern has to do with the argument that nothing can become without first being. This objection is perhaps seen as the Achilles' heel of Barth's concept of analogy and hence his ontology. If Pöhlmann holds this, Gunton asserts, he is a prisoner of the past and of language. Though God has in general been understood by analogy with substance, it does not necessarily mean that it has to be so. Pöhlmann is a prisoner of language because

there is the nonsensical doctrine that any substance would be, or at least contain as its ontic core, a qualityless substratum - qualityless because *it is* what HAS the qualities. Again, people have held that in

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

any change there is 'presupposed' some unchanging element, unchanging precisely because *it* is what *is the subject of* the change ... People are pretty clearly being held captive by a gross picture ... philosophers ask whether an individual is a bundle of qualities or whether there is 'bare particular' (significant phrase!) 'under' the qualities.⁶⁸

Now Gunton's criticisms of Pöhlmann may be valid. It may be argued that Pöhlmann is here trying to reinstate an Aristotelian conceptuality of being which Barth's trinitarian doctrine seek to avoid.⁶⁹ But his objections have failed to dispel the unease which Barth's ontology creates. There is a sense in which Pöhlmann is right: the event character of being does not *a priori* exclude its status of being nature. Might not one argue, as Hermann Schell does that this event character of being includes the concept of nature understood as 'the condition for the possibility of being event'. In other words, '[A]ctuality includes substantiality; motion includes reality; and objectivity includes objective being within itself - but not the reverse'.⁷⁰ God is not only *actus purus* but also *actio pura*. There can be no separation between being and doing; the two completely coincide. And it is precisely because this is so that the one cannot be neglected for the other, as Michael Schmaus has eloquently expressed it.

God's Being is an active, doing Being, purest efficacy, acting by being and being by acting. There is no realm in God that is not loftiest activity, constant deed. Doing is not wrung out of God's supposedly more underlying Being. God's *to-be* is the form that is stamped in doing. And God's doing is the "movement" that expresses his Being.

⁶⁸ P.T. Geach, 'Spinoza and the Divine Attributes', *Reason and Reality* (Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures V, London, 1972), 20. Quoted by C. Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 170.

⁶⁹ Gunton, *Becoming and Being*, 174.

⁷⁰ Hermann Schell, *Das Problem des Geistes* (1897). Quoted in *KB*, 342.

Being and Doing completely coincide.⁷¹

Furthermore, can we not argue that this is intrinsically found in Barth own thinking, even though it is not expressed in so many words. We receive the strongest hint of this in Barth's welcoming attitude to the conception of the *analogia entis* of the Roman Catholic theologian Gottlieb Söhngen. According to Barth Söhngen's viewpoint deviates significantly from the traditional conception of the analogy of being that is found in Aquinas. According to Söhngen, theological knowledge, that is, the knowledge of God's being, is not superordinated to but subordinated to the knowledge of his activity. Consequently, the *analogia entis* is subordinated to the *analogia fidei*. If the proper and valid order of being is *operari sequitue esse*, action follows being, the proper epistemic order must proceed from the reverse, namely, *esse sequitur operari*, ontological knowledge follows from the knowledge of activity. There must be an *assumptio* of the *analogia entis* into the *analogia fidei*. Barth quotes Söhngen approvingly: 'An *analogia et participatio divinae naturae* is able neither to evolve nor to become accessible to us out of the *analogia et participatio entis*. And not even in the slightest degree can we men sense the existence and mode of being of a self-disclosed God. The self-disclosure of God can itself be known only in this divine self disclosure'.⁷² This view corresponds to the fundamental tenets of Barth's theological epistemology. Furthermore the *participatio fidei*, in the way it is conceived here, cannot be *without* the *participatio entis*, since it would be ludicrous to speak of the Word participating in our manhood on the one hand, and yet deny on the other that

⁷¹ Michael Scmaus, *Dogmatik I*, 454. Quoted in *KB*, 342.

⁷² Cf. Gottlieb Söhngen, 'Analogia Fidei', *Catholica*, 1934, *Heft* 3 and 4, 204; quoted in *CD II/1*, 82.

we have a real participation in him. If man does not participate in Christ, it follows that Christ has not really participated in our manhood. But the *participatio fidei* is *not in opposition to* the *participatio entis*: both are a participation not on the ground of man's ability, but a truly human participation on the ground of God's grace. Barth found this presentation of the *analogia entis* so correspondent to his own understanding of the God-world relationship that he is prepared to say: 'If this is the Roman Catholic doctrine of *analogia entis*, then naturally I must withdraw my earlier statement that I regard the *analogia entis* as the "invention of the anti-Christ"'.⁷³

Barth concludes however that this is not the traditional Catholic view. 'But I am not aware that this particular doctrine of the *analogia entis* is to be found anywhere else in the Roman Catholic Church or that it has ever been adopted in this sense ... To me at any rate - seeing I can only assent to its main features - it is quite incomprehensible how, if we look at it from the historical and practical standpoint, this conception can be accepted as authentically Roman Catholic'.⁷⁴ Be that as it may, what is of moment for us here is that implicit in Barth's agreement to the conceptuality of Söhngen is, also, by implication, his agreement to the ontology of the Roman Catholic theologian which is in essence similar to the one expressed by both Schell and Schmaus.

5. Evaluation and Response

a. Barth's Assessment of Thomas Aquinas

Henry Chavannes has argued that Barth's understanding of Thomas Aquinas

⁷³ CD II/1, 82.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

did not come from his independent study of the texts of the great medieval theologian. Rather his appreciation of Aquinas came through his interaction with the Jesuit theologian Erich Przywara.⁷⁵ But Przywara's conception of the analogy of being, according to Chavannes, is idiosyncratic as the Jesuit thinker was attempting to synthesise the intellectualist approach of Aquinas with the voluntarist approach of Duns Scotus by using the tools found in modern philosophy. The end result is a kind of historical generalisation which reduces history to a purely Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Barth's view of the analogy of being was based primarily on the doctrine of Przywara and not on the doctrine of Aquinas. In a word, Barth has misunderstood Aquinas.

Now, there can be no doubt that Barth had interacted with Przywara, and was in fact very impressed by him. But this does not mean that his understanding of Aquinas was so influenced by the Jesuit thinker as to be mistaken. Barth was already quite acquainted with the teaching of the Angelic Doctor even before he invited Przywara to give a lecture and offer seminars during the winter semester of 1928-29 at Münster.⁷⁶ Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that while Przywara developed his concept of analogy from the perspective of salvation history, arguing that analogy must begin and end in the one concrete order of salvation, Aquinas developed his concept of analogy purely from a metaphysical standpoint. This Chavannes himself acknowledges. Przywara's analogy of being is both a metaphysical and theological notion while in Thomas Aquinas one finds only a metaphysical notion, the analogy

⁷⁵ See Henry Chavannes, *The Analogy between God and the Word in Saint Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (New York: Vantage Press, 1992), 152 ff.

⁷⁶ See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth. His life from letters and autobiographical texts* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 182 ff.

of being being the cornerstone of his conception of being which is 'not dependent in anyway on a supernatural revelation', and which makes 'no appeal to a definition imposed by the Church'.⁷⁷ In the light of this fact, it is difficult to see how Chavannes can sustain the thesis that Barth has misunderstood Aquinas.

A more tenable assessment is that of Balthasar's. He acknowledges the fact that the approaches of Barth and Aquinas are significantly different: Aquinas' style of thinking 'with its predilection for induction (working from below, drawing examples from there for the realm above and finally explaining theology in philosophical terms) is obviously in sharp contrast to Barth's exclusively theological thinking'.⁷⁸ The contrast can be expressed differently, between the *theological* rationality of Anselm - with which Barth feels very much at home - and the *philosophical* rationality of Aquinas. In accordance with Aristotelianism, Aquinas' thought proceeds from below up, moving therefore from the world of 'concrete experience and sensation, through abstraction, to universal concepts and a demonstration of the principles in them'. This methodology, which can be described as predominantly philosophical (and this is by Balthasar's own admission), has only little utility in theology. Theology deals 'primarily with God, the *concretissimum*, from whom nothing can be abstracted'.⁷⁹ In other words, theology deals with singulars. The trouble with Aquinas' methodology is that it is not very inclined to let the *singularia* be the main focus of his theology. Balthasar draws to our attention the fact that Aquinas stood in the middle of the incipient development in Western

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷⁸ *KB*, 265.

⁷⁹ *KB*, 264.

intellectual history during which there can still be found 'elements of the old theological unity' but when 'the profane sciences could first espy their growing autonomy'. In this context, Balthasar asserts, Aquinas' methodology, that is to say, the application of pretheological and philosophical concepts in the intratheological discourse, is justified, and one should, Balthasar urges, interpret Aquinas in the light of this transitional situation.⁸⁰

Open as he was to Barth's criticism, Balthasar would not take the proverbial final step with Barth to say that Thomist analogy is the philosophical Procrustean bed into which scholastic theology was forced. He categorically maintained that there should be no philosophical predeterminations that restrict theological thought, although, judging from the tone of the discussion he would admit that that tendency is very real in Aquinas. We agree with Barth, however, that this is more than just a tendency in Aquinas. Though, as Gunton points out very clearly, Barth's criticism that the analogy makes the supreme error of bracketing God and the creature into the same concept cannot stand by itself, since any attempt to express a concept analogously will result in this, this criticism is nevertheless true for the 'form that Thomas' analogy tends to take'.⁸¹ Aquinas' analogy of being is, as Gunton puts it, in agreement with Michael Buckley, the erection of 'theological structures independently of christology and pneumatology'. The analogy of being, conceived in this way, is a system of transcendentalism that is developed 'independently of the historical becoming on the basis of which Christian theology is distinctively what it is'.⁸² In the case of

⁸⁰ *KB*, 262-3.

⁸¹ *The One, the Three and the Many*, 138.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 138-9.

Aquinas, being is arbitrarily raised above becoming as a transcendent concept, without any considerations of the Trinity. Used in this way, analogy becomes the pre-existent Procrustean bed into which the data of revelation is forced.

b. On Barth's Assessment of the Natural Theology of Vatican I

We move on now to Barth's assessment of the natural theology of Vatican I. Before we examine Balthasar's response to one particular aspect of this criticism, let us, in summary form, delineate Barth's main objections. Barth launches two fundamental attacks on the *Vaticanum*, both of which are inter-related. The first has to do with the Council's partitioning of God, an exercise which is theologically illegitimate for Barth. This objection has been reasonably answered by Battista Mondin. Different modes of knowledge, Mondin argues, do not necessarily sacrifice the unity of the object. Barth has failed to make the distinction between false knowledge of God and one which is incomplete. He simply associates the two, making the two different concepts synonymous. Mondin rightly argues that the two must be distinguished. This of course does not mean that Barth has to submit to natural theology. He could still argue that reason has no intrinsic powers to attain to theological knowledge. But the two kinds of knowledge must be distinguished since even in the event of Revelation man's knowledge of God remains imperfect: we see dimly as in a mirror. 'Only God knows God completely'.⁸³ This confusion by Barth can be traced back to the lack of distinction in Barth in what the older theologians call the *theologia a^rchetypa* and the *theologia ectypa*.

The second complaint has very much to do with his objection to the

⁸³ Mondin, *Analogy*, 160-1.

methodology of Aquinas to whom Vatican I was very much beholden. It has to do with the abstract way in which the knowledge of God is construed by the Council. Balthasar agrees that the approach of the Council on this question is abstract. He explains that the teaching of the Council concerning man's knowledge of God has to do not with the fact of a supernatural knowledge of God, but with its possibility. He agrees with the view of J. M. A. Vacant, whom he quotes extensively, that the teaching of the Council merely asserts that the revelation of God is suited to the constitution of human reason. This is because '[h]uman creatures possess the means to recognise God based on this revelation'.⁸⁴ Balthasar was aware of the fact that this abstract and absolute way of stating the matter has caused considerable unease, even among the Fathers of the Council. However he agrees with Gasser's appreciation of the problem and why the Council has adopted this approach. For Gasser the Fathers who objected to the formula have confused the *principia rationis* with the *exercitium rationis*. The Council was concerned with the principle of reason. It simply states that God can be known by this principle; it does not concern itself with the *de facto* exercise of that faculty. Gasser also pointed out that this statement cannot be so abstract that it is completely inapplicable to any concrete human condition.⁸⁵ The caution exercised by the Council is such that it neither stated that people actually have found God in nature *de facto*, nor does it say explicitly how many people have attained theological knowledge outside biblical revelation. In other words, the Council has decided on the *de jure* question while leaving the *de facto* question open.

The Council's reserve on this point reaches almost dialectical

⁸⁴ KB, 304.

⁸⁵ KB, 305.

proportions: on the one hand, it does not want to drop the *certo* [with firm certitude] of *the possibility* of knowing God (*cognoscere posse*) in spite of all objections against it. And so the Council maintains that 'physical possibility' of the understanding to know God with certainty. On the other hand, however, it insists on the moral *necessity* of revelation so that human beings can attain to a knowledge of God in the fallen state *expedite, firma certitudine et nullo admixto errore* [directly, with firm certainty and without any admixture of error]. The *certo* that stands over against the *firma certitudine* belongs to the side of the *posse* and the *de jure*, while the *firma certitudine* that stands over against the *posse* belongs to the side of the actual *cognoscere* and of the *de facto* - based on revelation.⁸⁶

The approach of the Council is inimical to that of Karl Barth. The Council proceeds from the standpoint of the possibility of theological knowledge before considering its actuality while Barth would only allow the reverse. Balthasar is aware of this point and admits that 'Vatican I has in no way anticipated in its decisions the whole complex of questions we have described as the structure of Karl Barth's thought: thinking from the most concrete reality of being and history in order *from this perspective* to go on to describe the conditions for their possibility'.⁸⁷ Balthasar however goes on to maintain that there is no genuine contradictions between Barth's statement about man's capacity to know God within the concrete order of revelation and the statement of Vatican I. But this is the case only if the statements of the Council are re-interpreted in the light of Balthasar's theology of grace which he learnt from de Lubac, and even here, one should add that the fundamental objection of Barth in relation to the movement of thought of the Council is left unanswered.

⁸⁶ KB, 306.

⁸⁷ KB, 308.

CHAPTER VIII

REVELATION AND THEOLOGY: CATALOGICAL ANALOGY

1. Christ The Centre of Theology

In his study on the theology of Karl Barth, Balthasar has maintained that Christocentrism is not exclusive to the approaches of specifically Protestant and Reformed theologies 'but are views that today's Catholic authors (and not just a random sample of them, but the most important and representative) consider to be theirs too'.¹ This however does not preclude the fact that the Christocentrism of Barth and Balthasar seem to be different in both its formal and material aspects. Balthasar has certainly not glossed over this difference, but has taken great pains to show exactly where the difference lies. However, it should be pointed out even at the outset that this difference should not cause us to marginalise the common ground between the two theologians.

Balthasar appeals to the writings of several Catholic theologians to demonstrate the Christocentrism of Catholic thought. The first major figure he cited is his mentor, Erich Przywara. Przywara, who was an active dialogue partner of the Swiss Reformed theologian, attempts to surmount the Scotist-Thomist dichotomy regarding the Incarnation by leaving behind as it were the quest for speculative possibilities and by concentrating instead on discovering necessity within the *de facto* world order. His Christocentric starting point can be clearly appreciated from the following passage cited by Balthasar.

The path to God and the image of God are but shadowy intimations

¹ KB, 326.

whose corresponding visible form is revealed only in the one who is God's only 'interpretation'. Indeed, he is God's pre-ceeding (*ex-egesis*), the one who makes God visible to us: Jesus Christ. According to his own eternal decree (Eph 1ff), God is revealed nowhere else but in Christ, and Christ's essence is in the last analysis nothing other than the revelation of this God. So he himself has said: 'Whoever sees me sees the Father' ... Consequently, everything that might be a way to God or an image of God is only a dim reflection or a first intimation of what alone is revealed in Christ. All the traits in which God shines before the creature are themselves only drawn out and interpreted in Christ: the God who is only God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no other God beside him, and thus all general traits of God are either prior or subsequent radiance of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

In this passage, Przywara reduces everything to the one central focal point, namely, God in the crucified Christ. This same emphasis is made in his *Deus semper maior* when he writes: 'He (Christ) draws every direct statement about the relationship between God and man into his dialectic of intersecting cross-beams, where the "crossing" of a positive statement by a negative one imitates the true Cross (and as such is the only form of negative theology)'.³ Alongside his Ignatian spirituality, which emphasises the highest concreteness with its stress on the application of the senses, Przywara, according to Balthasar, 'proceeds consistently, judging all logic, and thus ontology too, by his christological, historical and actualist standard'.⁴

Romano Guardini takes a similar standpoint when he maintains that everything refers 'back to Christ in their essence and in him the quintessence of the world's meaning enters the stage of history in his nature'.⁵ It is not that Christ is in the

² Erich Przywara, *Summula* (Glock und Lutz, 1946), 17-18. Cf. KB, 329.

³ KB, 329.

⁴ KB, 329.

⁵ Michael Guardini, *Wesen des Christentums* (1940) II, 51-52. Cf. KB, 331.

world, Guardini argues. Rather, the world is in Christ. That is to say, the world is 'spaced' in Christ, just as everything is 'essenced' in him.

Christian thinking in general and theology in particular must be Christological. That is to say, it must be shaped by Christ. In a passage from *Der Herr* (1949), Guardini gives us a clear explication of his conception of christocentrism.

What does the formation of Christian thinking, for example, consists in? First, man lives with his thoughts in the general world. He measures these thoughts by the experience of things and by general rules of logic. After this, he judges what is and what can be. But as soon as he encounters Christ, he must make a decision: Will he judge Christ according to the perspective? At first he will try to do but will sense a demand at work: to invert the relationship and take Christ as his starting point: no longer thinking *about* Christ but *from* him. Now the demand will be to place Christ no longer among the laws of immediate thinking and experiencing but to recognise him as the highest standard of what is real and possible ... What had previously been certain is now called into question. The image of the real is overthrown. Again and again the question recurs of whether Christ is truly so great that he can be the standard of everything; of whether the world really returns to him ... But to the extent that thought perseveres, it experiences that he really is the category that is the foundation to everything, the system that coordinates to thought, in which everything contains his truth. For now the figure of Christ has grown beyond all other standards. For him there is no measuring rod. He himself is the standard.⁶

This notion of Christ as the norm, standard and measure for all things is consistent with Balthasar's understanding of the Incarnation as the *Gestalt der Gestalten*.⁷

We turn now to Michael Schmaus. For him, Christ is the essence of Christianity because he is the very image of God, the archetype after whose pattern Adam and indeed all of creation has been formed. As the ultimate and most radiant Word which God has spoken, Christ is the ultimate meaning of all existence and of

⁶ KB, 330.

⁷ See Chapter 3.

all that happened in nature and history. This means that all 'earlier words that the Father has spoken in the natural and supernatural revelations have been gathered up and transfigured in Christ'. Those words would indeed not have been spoken by God without this concluding Word which is Christ. Hence all things have their being in Christ. In his *Katholische Dogmatik* (1940),⁸ Schmaus wrote: 'The world accordingly, does not possess a completely autonomous order that is ultimately self-subsistent and self-sufficient. Its order is in fact taken up into the order whose ground is Christ'. The eternal plan of salvation, according to Schmaus, is conceived and determined from all eternity on the Incarnation of the *Logos*: 'It does not make much sense to mull over what God could have done or even would have to have done if he had not decided to redeem us. In fact that is what he has decided. And before that simple fact, all this talk of "what if" and "however" must be stunned into silence' (492-493). Not only that, the foundation of created order is also Christ. 'God's design for creation is Christocentric'. And because of this, Christ is, for Schmaus, as he is for Guardini and Balthasar, the ground and measure of human existence. Schmaus points to the truncated and artificial attempt to synthesise the natural and supernatural. Christians, he argues, do not need to reconcile Christ and the world together: Christ himself is the mediation and the reconciliation. This reconciliation takes place at the Cross which is the permanent judgement of nature and culture. 'All culture stands henceforth under the judgement and the blessing of the Cross of Christ' (225).

Several others are brought into the discussion by Balthasar. Eucharis Berbuir argues that 'everything pertaining to man can be accepted and assumed by the one man Jesus Christ in the mysterious unity with the *Logos*', again the notion that

⁸ See *KB*, 329.

creation is grounded in Christ. Emile Mersch also expounds this view with clarity and penetration. But his main contribution is to be found in his equally penetrating analysis that theologians have sought to induce a unity into theology from the outside. But these syntheses remain external to the content of revelation. 'They write it on the level of history or of natural science or of ethics or philosophy, rather than placing that unity on its own level'. This kind of unity, Mersch asserts, would result only in the conception of the external understanding of the content of revelation. The true inner unity of theology is the whole Christ. Thus, for Mersch, 'theology is truly theocentric only when it is christocentric'.⁹

2. Catalogical Analogy

The christological focus of the theologians discussed above is in concord with the most fundamental theological intuition of Karl Barth: that christology must be accorded a central place in theology. Christology must determine theology 'as a whole and in all parts' if it is not to succumb to some alien sway and thus lose its character.¹⁰ This is certainly the very basis of Balthasar's entire vision: from the beginning to the end, Christ is the well-spring and ultimate horizon of his theological program. Yet, as Angelo Scola has rightly observed, it is in christology that the *analogia entis*, which because of its indispensability for Balthasar is a theme which runs through his entire work, finds its dizzying summit: '... the *Verbum-caro* runs its ineffable, undivided, and unconfused unity from one pole of the analogy to the other (God and man), remaining under the law of analogy itself, without ever annulling it

⁹ Emile Mersch, *Las Théologie du Corps mystique*, I, 47-48. Cf., KB, 334.

¹⁰ CD I/1, 123.

or passing beyond it into a blasphemous idealism that treats God as a moment in the triad of absolute being and thus introduces the historical process into God himself'.¹¹

In Christ Balthasar has found a solution to the very real danger which Karl Barth clearly saw, namely, the erection of a metaphysics and ontology which is not based on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. In Christ, Balthasar has found a way to surmount the unfruitful alternative between the *analogia fidei* and *analogia entis* suggested by Barth's theology. In Christ, too, Balthasar has found a theological method which is in essential agreement with Barth without having to go all the way with him to what Balthasar calls a dead end.¹² Balthasar works on the presupposition that form and content are inseparable. Everything in the realm of method stands or falls with this fundamental presupposition of the union of form and content. Balthasar's catalogical analogy, as a theological method, takes its form from the Incarnation. It has as its starting point and its forming principle (*Formprinzip*) God's primal *kenosis*. At the same time it asserts that in order for one to approach the trinitarian event in God, one has to 'feel' one's way back to God through what is disclosed in the divine *kenosis* within the theology of the covenant and the Cross. Thus for Balthasar, theology has the dual movement of *condescensio* (catalogically) and of co-rising (analogically). And since the Incarnate Word is the totality of the absolute analogy, theology is a form of catalogical/analogical integration.¹³ This

¹¹ Angelo Scolia, 'Nature and Grace in Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Communio* XVIII, 2, Summer 1991, 215.

¹² *KB*, 362.

¹³ Wolfgang Treitler, 'True Foundations of Authentic Theology', *Hans Urs von Balthasar. His Life and Work*. Edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 181.

integration, Balthasar argues, upholds the legitimate aspects of the *analogia entis* and the *analogia fidei*. On the one hand catalogical analogy avoids the danger of the formation of any analogy that has the power to sustain itself outside the historical becoming of God. Rather it locates itself within the event of the covenant in salvation history which culminates in Jesus Christ. In this regard the opening of the world's truths is based on the *condescensio* of God himself. On the other hand, this way of thinking helps us to understand the relationship between creation and salvation history, a relationship which is emphasised in Karl Barth's own theological thinking. Wolfgang Treitler captures the essence of this and expresses it with eloquence.

... in this catalogical analogy, there occurs at the same time the disclosure of what lies in being as a creation from God (and thus again catalogically), namely, that it must have been able to be prepared for the new reality which could no longer be deduced from it and which can therefore be determined in its truth only by way of catalog. The use of the perfect tense in this statement derives its logic immediately from the catalog of analogy: it is and was impossible to know ahead of time that to which creation, if it was to be adequately at its creator's disposition, had to be further opened up in view of the history of salvation which occurs in creation and at the same time draws it into itself.¹⁴

Balthasar learnt this catalogical thinking from Bonaventure who among all the great scholastics is considered by the Jesuit theologian as offering the widest scope to the aesthetic in his theology. It has been rightly observed that all the main themes in Balthasar's theological aesthetics are found in Bonaventure, including the mysticism of the Cross through which one enters into the trinitarian mystery which is the glory of God.¹⁵ Bonaventure's approach is shaped by the theological presupposition that

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁵ Breandán Leahy, 'Theological Aesthetics', *Beauty of Christ. An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Edited by Bede McGregor, O.P. and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 52-3.

man can only enter into God *per Christum* who is the absolute mediator. If this is true, then this entry which is tied to the God-man, must necessarily take on his form: Jesus Christ is the way and no one comes to the Father except through him (Jn 14:6). Now if the Son sent into the world as man is the one who descended from the Father, then entry into God *per Christum* means that one is being drawn into this descent. In other words, entry into God *per Christum* is the *condescensio* of human beings with the Incarnate Son. Bonaventure identifies this as the positive form of all valid theology. Because the theological form must take its measure from this *condescensio*, it must therefore have the form of descent within itself.¹⁶

Balthasar's exposition of Bonaventure's understanding of the significance of the Incarnation is eloquent. 'The Incarnation is the loving *condescendere* of God, who takes flesh and makes himself visible for sinners, because they cannot any longer grasp his divinity'.¹⁷ This Word who took on flesh has already created man after his own image thereby making him imitable. But the Word as the light is inaccessible and must therefore become overshadowed by the flesh so that man could see and follow. It is only through the *condescensio* that true theology is possible.

This means also that the eternal Word, the expression of the Godhead, when become audible and visible can be understood only as the expression of the Godhead: in Jesus Christ, the whole Trinity gives witness to itself. The Father gives witness to himself in the fact (of the Incarnation), for he is the power, the Son in the utterance, for he is the Word, the Holy Spirit in the intention for he is the love and bond. Without God's Trinity, the Incarnation of God cannot be understood, and the phenomenon of Jesus Christ cannot be interpreted: *Incarnatio non cognoscitur, nisi cognoscatur distinctio personarum*.¹⁸

¹⁶ Trietler, 'Foundations', 170.

¹⁷ *GL* II:327.

¹⁸ *GL* II:328.

In the descent therefore Christ becomes our exit and entrance. He becomes our ascent to God and our descent to neighbour and our apprehension of spiritual truth. In this descent God sets himself at what Balthasar calls the midpoint of the world where the descent into the material nature and the ascent to God ensue: man. 'In that this midpoint of the world is the expression of God's descent, the descent within this world must be emphasised in it: it becomes the midpoint of humility, of poverty, of the cross. And in that God's descent reveals his immeasurable loftiness, the humility of Christ becomes the fundamental mystery. "The depth of God-made-man, his humility, is so great that reason founders on it"'.¹⁹

Central to Balthasar's theological methodology then, is the concept of *kenosis*. Balthasar speaks of three forms of *kenosis*, the first and foundational being the intratrinitarian. This is the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, in equality of essence, in which the Father gives himself to this Son and forgoes the sole possession of the divine nature on his behalf. This is the primal *kenosis* which provides the fundamental possibility for God's other *kenoses*. It is the intradivine presupposition for the economic manifestations of the divine descent of God into the world. In this primal *kenosis*, the second *kenosis*, namely creation, is grounded. Here in creation God's descent is seen in his giving to another out of love the freedom of self-actualisation. But this giving reaches the point where human beings, in not wanting to owe themselves to God's *kenosis*, seek to actualise their autonomy. This unheard-of-opposition against God in sin is the basis for the theo-dramatic process of God's redemption, and, by implication, the process of God's contact with sin, 'first in the covenant with Israel, the hard election of a people, in order to allow the power of sin

¹⁹ GL II:329.

as well as the superabundant power of God to actualise themselves in it: Israel's pre-existence'.²⁰ Israel, however, violated the covenant by hardening their hearts and following after their own plans (Ps 81:12f). This has resulted in an 'empty time' at the end of which God entered as the unique One in his final enagement with the world. This is the third *kenosis* in which the Son gives himself to the Cross (which is the peak of this *kenosis*) where he suffers unsurpassable abandonment and God-forsakenness. Here in the Cross is to be found the confrontation between the groundlessness of the love of God and the groundlessness of human sin. 'Here he suffers the unsurpassable forsakenness by God in the descent of his mission *ad inferos*, and he thereby transverses *pro nobis* the infinite spaciousness which the trinitarian God is, in and for himself'.²¹ The *kenosis* is therefore located within catalogology and its dialectical presupposition, dialectical precisely because there can be no access to the immanent Trinity except from its economic manifestation.

Catalogical thinking then provides the framework for understanding analogy. Thus it is in the framework of his Christology that Balthasar's concept of the *analogia entis* must be understood. The Balthasarian *analogia entis* cannot be seen as a generic concept in which both God and man are placed under the abstract heading of 'being-as-such'. In its employment of philosophical terms and categories the *analogia entis* must not step outside the parameters of Christology as is the danger of both Scotism and later Scholastic rationalism. This does not mean however that the concept of analogy does not have universal application, for 'it must extend to the creature's supernatural elevation, through grace, to divine sonship; so too, we can conclude, it

²⁰ Treitler, 'Foundations', 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

must apply to that highest union between divine and created being, in the God-man himself'.²² In Christ the hypostatic union of the human and divine must for Balthasar be 'the final proportion [*Mass*] between the two and hence must be the "concrete *analogia entis*" itself. However, it must not in any way overstep this analogy in the direction of identity'.²³

The question of the transcendence and immanence of God is given full consideration in Balthasar's conception of the *analogia entis*. Balthasar offers an interpretation of the teaching of the Fourth Lateran formula which reads: 'however great the similarity between Creator and creature, the dissimilarity is always greater (*quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*)'. Balthasar recognises however the insufficiency of conciliar formulation and the fact that such formulations can be made complicated by a literal or figurative iconostasis. It should serve as a caution, however, against over rationalisation and must be seen in a dialectical fashion: God is in himself Wholly Other; in becoming man he became Not Other.²⁴ By giving this concept a catalogical foundation Balthasar has tried to remove the alternative between *analogia entis* and *analogia fidei*. In so doing Balthasar has also tried to avoid both the serious charge often made against those proponents of the *analogia entis*, that of establishing the indissoluble relation of the world to God through a general concept of being, and the equally serious charge made against those proponents of the *analogia fidei* or *verbi*,

²² TD III:221.

²³ TD III:222.

²⁴ Deidere Carabine, 'The Fathers: The Church's Intimate, Youthful Diary', *The Beauty of Christ*, 86.

that of negating creation as the ground of meaning.

The formula therefore does not circumvent the abyss between divine and created natures, even when it is so grounded in the Christological and catalogical premise. Balthasar is unequivocally clear about this: 'The fact that the person of Jesus Christ bridges this abyss without harm to his unity should render us speechless in the presence of the mystery of his person'.²⁵ Thus the *communicatio idiomatum* does not abolish the dissimilarity of created and uncreated nature. It is possible to speak of the of the interchang^eability (i.e., analogously) of the attributes only because they are united in the one person. There can be no interchange of attributes between the divine and human natures. Balthasar argues therefore that the *analogia entis* refers to the infinite and absolute God who cannot be compared with the finite creature who owes its existence to him. Here Balthasar is in full agreement with Barth that there can be no external vantage point from which the creature could compare itself with God. The creature can only look to God in total dependency. This, Balthasar pointed out, has been understood by the Fathers of the Church - Maximus, Bonaventure, Scotus, and even Thomas - suggesting, implicitly at least, that Barth's reading of Thomas may not be entirely accurate.²⁶ There can be no doubt that for Balthasar, the infinite and the finite are not related 'aequivoce'. The analogy between God and the world must be understood in the sense that all created nature is, at a very fundamental and indestructible level, the image of the primal Image: God. '[T]hroughout the history of Christology, the purpose and meaning of the Incarnation of the Logos has been portrayed as the transcendent, inner elevation of the image: it is lifted up in the

²⁵ TD III:220.

²⁶ TD III:222-3.

primal, divine Image; or the latter is implanted into the former'.²⁷ From the aspect of being, the union, notwithstanding the abyss, between the divine and created natures can be conceived in the supposition that in every act of creation God communicates something of himself. 'This brings us to the thesis that the ordinary act of creation is a partial or inchoate Christology and that Christology is the superabundant expression of anthropology'.²⁸ Alongside this, the trinitarian mission of Christ must also be brought into consideration. The *analogia entis* must not lead us to speak of a two-fold consciousness in the logos-made-man. Rather the Son takes up one unitary mission since, through his perfect obedience to the Father, he identifies fully with this mission.

... there is an analogy between the Son's being begotten and the creature's being freely and sovereignly created by God. This analogy can form a bridge both to the Son's 'becoming creature' and to our being 'reborn' (Jn 3:3, 7). After all, the incommensurable distance does not mean that the created world is alienated from its origin; the gradations in the world's 'imaging' of God (*vestigium-imago-similitudo*) show that this is not so. Then the trinitarian analogy enables the Son too, without abolishing the *analogia entis*, simultaneously to do two things: he represents God to the world - but in the mode of the Son who regards the Father as 'greater' and to whom he eternally owes all that he is - and he represents the world to God, by being, as man (rather, as the God-man), 'humble, lowly, modest, docile [*tapeinos*] of heart' (Mt 11:29). It is on the basis of these two aspects, united in an abiding analogy, that the Son can take up his *one* unitary mission. This mission is to represent the Father's authority vis-à-vis men and to represent mankind's sin in the sight of God, the Judge, achieving its atonement, together with his 'brothers', before the Father.²⁹

The above discussion clearly shows Balthasar's attempt to combine the doctrine of analogy put forward by the Fourth Lateran Council and the Christology of

²⁷ TD III:223.

²⁸ TD III:234.

²⁹ TD III:230.

Chalcedon. More precisely, Balthasar seeks to re-interpret the Council's doctrine of analogy in the light of Chalcedonian Christology. The result is a concept of analogy that is materially and formally quite similar to that of Karl Barth. Wolfgang Treitler's explication of Balthasar's use of Chalcedonian Christology in his conception of catalogical analogy is incisive.

In terms of analogy: in this determinate man, Jesus of Nazereth, in whom God is present in unsurpassable and unique manner as himself (*similitudo; indivise, inseparabiliter* - similarity; undividedly, inseparably) God is revealed as the *Deus semper maior*, God who is ever greater (*maior dissimilitudo; inconfuse, immutabiliter* - greater dissimilitude; unconfused, unalterably).

In terms of catalog; in the Son of God sent from God (true God from true God) the truth of free sinful humanity before God becomes completely manifest (*similitudo; indivise, inseparabiliter*), but in such a way that God has nothing in common with sin but, as the one who infinitely towers over sin, he brings sin into an annihilating and saving judgement (*maior dissimilitudo; in confuse immutabiliter*).

Since, however, the definiteness of the catalogical analogy is in the Son who descended, it remains clear that analogy is really founded in catalog even here. Analogy, understood in these terms, goes completely through Jesus, the Christ, according to von Balthasar, and thus Christ himself is analogy in a catalogically discernible specificity: absolute analogy, thus *analogia entis*, but also *analogia libertatis* and *analogia salutis*, the absolute catalogical analogy.³⁰

The place of the Spirit in all this has already been discussed in Chapters 2 & 3. We have only to emphasise here some salient points that are relevant to the present discussion. The first is that the Holy Spirit is the interpretative agent who testifies to the Incarnate Word. The Holy Spirit, who knows the voice of God in the Word of the Son, gives the human voice which responds to this Word its correct meaning. The implication of this is that theology can only be done in the Holy Spirit. Secondly the Holy Spirit gives man the ability to perceive the form (*Gestalt*) of the Incarnate Word,

³⁰ Treitler, 'Foundations', 176.

creating within him the *sensorium* (faith) for this, so that alongside the ontic order which orientates man to the objective form of God's revelation in the *Gestalt* of Christ is the noetic faculty with which he can apprehend the form. Faith is the only organ through which man can recognise the absolute form of God's revelation. Both the objective and subjective aspects of theological epistemology are given their proper place in the catalogical analogy. 'This objectivity consists in this: that its truth occurs in the communication of truth to the believing theologian - there is no other theologian - by the Holy Spirit, which is the one Spirit'.³¹ The pneumatology of Balthasar is built on two key texts in the Gospel of John. The first is John 16:13: 'The Spirit will lead you into all truth', and the second, John 16:14: 'The Spirit will take what is mine and will declare it to you'. The first text shows that the fundamental mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the Christian community into the truth, that is, into Christ. And the second is to show the link between the Spirit and the Son which is emphasised by John: the Holy Spirit is and always will be the Spirit of the Son.³²

It must be appreciated that Balthasar's catalogical analogy is a very serious and tenable response to Barth's concerns. Balthasar has taken the objections of Barth with utmost seriousness. He has developed his understanding of analogy from the standpoint of Christology. Furthermore, by insisting on the glorious form of Christ as the measure of all things, Balthasar's theological aesthetics is transposed from a Christocentrism to a trinitarian theocentrism.³³

This transparency realises itself both in his (Christ's) claim and in his

³¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

³² John O'Donnell, 'The Logic of Divine Glory', *The Beauty of Christ*, 167.

³³ Breandán Leahy, 'Theological Aesthetics', *The Beauty of Christ*, 29.

authority, which are the authorised representation of the Father, and in his whole poverty and in his self-abandonment, which free the whole space for the Father to act in him. Both are one: but only the second can show that the first is genuine, as love. The glory of the Father can make itself 'substantially' present through both in the incarnate Son. In this way the theological aesthetics is transposed from Christcentrism into a final (trinitarian) theocentrism, in which the Holy Spirit too receives a central place as the one who effects the neutral indwelling in love between Christ and the Father: the Holy Spirit is the personal identity of the personal distinction in the Godhead.³⁴

Balthasar thus works with a trinitarian ontology, and his concept of analogy must be understood from this perspective. Whatever one may say then about the validity of Barth's objections of Aquinas' conception of the *analogia entis*, these objections do not apply to Balthasar.

3. Nature and Grace

The problem of theological epistemology and the relationship between the *analogia entis* and *analogia fidei*, can be examined from the standpoint of the broader theme of the nature-grace relationship. Catholic theology has been struggling with this problem ever since the ground breaking proposal by Blondel in the 19th century brought the neo-scholastic doctrine of pure nature into question.³⁵ In contemporary Catholic theology, Balthasar and Rahner represent the two opposite poles of the debate. This has resulted in two very different theologies of religion, around which

³⁴ GL VII:262-3.

³⁵ See Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology. Report of A Personal Journey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), especially chapter XV, 229-255; Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon. Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), Chapters 1 & 2, 7-65; *The Dynamics of Grace. Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), Chapters 6 & 7; Mcdard Kehl, 'Introduction', *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 17ff; and Chapter 1 of this work.

nearly all other Catholic thinkers can be broadly grouped.³⁶

Balthasar's theology of grace has been largely shaped by his teacher Henry de Lubac. Arguably, de Lubac has done more than any other Catholic theologian in bringing about the re-examination of the problem of grace and nature.³⁷ Dissatisfied with the extrincism of the neo-scholastic theology of grace, de Lubac, who was influenced by Blondel, argued for notion of grace which can be described as a transcendence that is immanent. God's gift of grace is not something extrinsic to human nature. It is not that the human pre-exists his own coming into being, waiting to receive being from the Creator. Rather God's gift is intrinsic to man. This, de Lubac argues, is clear from the doctrine of creation. The endowment of a supernatural finality cannot find its analogue in the human gift of a human donor. To exist in the present order is to be directed towards the supernatural finality. Hence, to say 'I' or 'I exist' or 'I have a finality' is to affirm implicitly the same reality. In creation God has willed us into existence because he has also willed us to be with himself. The finality of man is therefore an ontological reality. The radical extrincism of the pure nature hypothesis has simply missed this point. This has resulted in the conclusion that there are two finalities for man. It thus labours under a false premise which must be rejected. The implications of this to our present concern is obvious. Man is confronted with a paradox. On the one hand he has a 'natural' desire for God. This desire, if we are to understand it aright, must be seen as a desire for the God who is freely making a gift of himself in love. In this way this desire is the most absolute of all desires. But

³⁶ Bede McGregor, O.P. 'The Wider Ecumenism: Christian Prayer and Other Religions', *The Beauty of Christ*, 195.

³⁷ Duffy, *Horizon*, 66.

humans are themselves unable to bring this desire to fulfillment. This can only be achieved in grace. 'Humanity hungers for God; but for God as God can only be, i.e. as love, freely giving Godself'.³⁸

Balthasar picked up this important insight of de Lubac. Grace and nature should not be conceived as extrinsic to one another. Supernature enfolds nature; nature is embedded in grace, the *analogia entis* in the *analogia fidei*. Balthasar formulates this Christologically as follows.

Human nature and its mental faculties are given their true centre in Christ; in him they obtain their final truth, for such was the will of God, the Creator of nature, from eternity. Man, therefore, in investigating the relationship *between* nature and supernature, has no need to abandon the standpoint of faith, to set himself up as the mediator between God and the world, between revelation and reason, or to cast himself in the role of judge *over* that relationship. All that is necessary is for him to understand 'the one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ' (1 Tim. 2:5), and to believe him in whom 'were all things created in heaven and on earth ... all by him and in him' (Col. 1:16). Christ did not leave the Father when he became man to bring all creation to fulfillment; and neither does the Christian need to leave his center in Christ in order to mediate him to the world, to understand his relation to the world, to build a bridge between revelation and nature, philosophy and theology.³⁹

Two important points emerge from this. Firstly, from the Christological perspective, nature cannot be seen merely as the extrinsic presupposition of grace. Nature must be considered as 'an ingredient of the christic whole which is grace'.⁴⁰ Secondly, nature derives its meaning from grace without losing its autonomy. This is important for Balthasar's revelation theology. Nature is that minimum 'which must be present in every possible situation where God wants to reveal himself'. This minimum is the

³⁸ Duffy, *Horizon*, 68.

³⁹ *ET* I:194-195.

⁴⁰ Scola, 'Nature', 208.

analogia entis. 'If there is to be a revelation, then it can only proceed from God to the creature - to a creature that precisely as a creature does not include revelation in its conceptual image. The "nature" that grace presupposes is createdness as such'.⁴¹

These two considerations are important in Balthasar's understanding of general revelation and the natural knowledge of God. But before we turn to them it is important that we pause here to see if there are similarities between Balthasar's theology of grace and the Barthian perception. On the one hand Barth would not speak of a prevenient grace in the way Balthasar has done. Though he conceives of the relationship between creation and redemption in the context of the covenant, Barth could not (perhaps he would not) envisage a common, universal grace which makes the knowledge of God both a possibility and an actuality, even if this knowledge has only resulted in idolatry and superstition. For him there can be only one grace of God which, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, enables man to apprehend God's revelation in Christ by faith. And yet, on the other hand, Barth could say that Jesus Christ is the one grace of God⁴² through whom God's eternal gracious plan for mankind, *both* in creation and redemption, is effected and accomplished.⁴³ God's grace therefore encompasses creation and providence,⁴⁴ man's reconciliation and redemption,⁴⁵ human faith, hope and love. The God who is 'wholly grace' is in Jesus Christ God

⁴¹ *KB*, 285.

⁴² *CD* IV/1:86.

⁴³ *DO*, 3.

⁴⁴ *CD* III/1:18ff., 26ff., 39ff., 66ff., 95, 118 f., 218 f., 228 ff.

⁴⁵ *CD* I/1, 469; IV/1: 79 ff. *Credo*, 166, *DO*, 115, 129 ff., 153 ff., *CD* I/2, 882 f., IV/3, 902 ff.

‘for us’ and ‘with us’. As such, man’s entire existence is an existence in grace - he is utterly dependent on God’s grace in every sphere of his life.⁴⁶ Can we not argue that this line of thought cannot but acknowledge, implicitly at least, the concept of prevenient grace or universal, common grace? Barth cannot avoid this concept altogether. In his moving exposition of ‘Given Time’, Barth writes: ‘The time given to man tells him that he is not only the creature of God, but his covenant partner’. ‘Given time’ speaks of the faithfulness of God to himself and to the creature. ‘In all its hiddenness’, Barth continues, ‘it is the rustling of the Holy Spirit by which, however deaf to it we may be, we are surrounded in virtue of the fact that we are in the movement of time and are obliged to make this movement in and with our life, so long as we have it’. In this given time, Barth explains, we are confronted with the presence and gift of God’s grace. ‘If we are to speak of prevenient grace it is difficult to see in what better form it may be better perceived and grasped than in the simple fact that time is given to us men’.⁴⁷ This can be set in Barth’s relational ontology. The ‘God who created us and is in the process of resuing and preserving us; God who is not dismayed at our sin, and does not cease to be for us, nor reverse his determination to be for him and in mutual fellowship; God in all the defiance of our unfaithfulness by his own faithfulness’.⁴⁸ Here then we find an argument for continuity not dissimilar to Balthasar’s theology of grace, that despite the ontological remoteness between man and God that is caused by sin, there is a closeness on the part of God in so far as he is God ‘for us’. This faithfulness of the Creator to the

⁴⁶ *CD* I/2, 157 - 393; II/2, 575; III/1, 363 ff., III/2, 164 ff., IV/1, 83.

⁴⁷ *CD* III/2, 526.

⁴⁸ *CD* III/2, 529.

creature constitutes also his readiness for man. This readiness must also mean that the world, regardless of how perverted it is by sin, cannot be meaningless. And because God has not only given us time, but has actually entered it, human history likewise cannot be an empty process. For both theologians, it must be remembered that the positivity of the world and of history is not due to some abstract goodness intrinsic to the world and the historical process but to the fact that God in Christ is the creator of the world and Lord of history. However reluctant Barth is in taking the proverbial next step, it must nonetheless be taken, for surely all this must have some bearing into the whole area of God's revelation in creation and man's capacity to know him, however inadequately, in that revelation.

4. General Revelation

Karl Barth's rejection of natural theology, as we have seen, has also resulted in his denial of general revelation. Because of his claim that there can be no knowledge of God apart from his revelation in Jesus Christ, Barth has rejected the approach of the *Vaticanum* which posits a knowledge of God the Creator. This would, according to Barth, destroy the unity of God. Furthermore, Barth holds that revelation is redemptive. In his debate with Brunner, he writes: 'How can Brunner maintain that a real knowledge of the true God, however imperfect it may be (and what knowledge of God is not imperfect?) does not bring salvation?'⁴⁹ Barth's concern is clear: 'If man could achieve some knowledge of God outside of his revelation, which is in Jesus Christ, man would have contributed at least in some measure to his salvation, his

⁴⁹ Karl Barth, '"No!'" in Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1985), 164.

spiritual standing with God. The principle of grace alone would be compromised'.⁵⁰

We believe that Barth's position regarding general revelation here is untenable for two reasons. Firstly, he has wrongly associated *theologia naturalis* with the revelation of God in creation thinking that the latter implies the former. Brunner is right when he argues that the two cannot be so associated, and that it is possible to affirm God's revelation in creation without subscribing to natural theology.⁵¹ Secondly, he has wrongly conceived of revelation as redemptive. The older theology has made the distinction between historical faith and justifying faith, pointing to the actuality and possibility of rejecting God's offer of salvation which he makes in his revelation.

Barth is rightly concerned to maintain the *sola Christus* and *sola gratia*. He is also right in insisting that there can be only one revelation. But this does not mean that the notion of general revelation must be denied or that it cannot find a place in his Christocentrism. Balthasar has sought to show how this can be achieved without compromise. What follows is a brief examination of his attempt.⁵²

As we have already noted, there cannot be, for Balthasar, a disjunction between natural and special revelation. Natural revelation is a free *act* of God. This revelation is 'natural' because it occurs in the medium of the created order. But in relation to its object, it is anything but natural. Although revelation is an act of God,

⁵⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1985), 164.

⁵¹ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God. Dogmatics Vol. 1* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 132ff.

⁵² We have already discussed Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between the revelation of God in creation and in Jesus Christ in chapter two. Without repeating what we have already said there, we now pick this matter up once again to see how Balthasar answers Barth's objections, and to show more clearly how he brings general and special revelation into his Christological schema.

natural revelation must be seen in the closest possible way with creation. Balthasar could therefore say that God's will to reveal himself in creation is materially identical with the act of creation itself. But the *Acta* of revelation must be distinguished from its mere end result: created nature.⁵³ Balthasar's understanding of God's revelation, even his revelation in creation is dynamic, not static. And yet, revelation is so closely associated with creation that the latter is said to be the reflection of the glory of God. Balthasar uses the term image to bring this point across. The world, as the theatre of God's glory, is the image which reflects the Primal Image: Christ. The relation with this image and Christ who is *the* Image of the invisible God is understood in the light of Christ being the ground and goal of creation. Thus God's revelation in creation must be placed within the Christological bracket. It is in this context that the continuum between general and special revelation must be seen. The implications of this is clearly spelt out in the following passage.

If one inserts this thought into the Christological bracket - that is, if one keeps in mind that the meaning and movement of God's revelation in creation is his will finally to reveal himself in the Incarnation of Christ - then this first 'natural' revelation (which, as it were opens up the antechamber) will seem to be like a preparation, foundation and onset of God's intimate revelation of his Word opening up the deepest regions of his being. And, accordingly, the capacity inherent in the human being to touch God as his Alpha and Omega will seem to be the preparation, foundation and onset of a higher capacity given to him in grace also to grasp God through faith in his personal Word.⁵⁴

Seen within this christological bracket, natural revelation cannot be either denied or understood to be self contained and sufficient. To do the latter would be to

⁵³ KB, 309.

⁵⁴ KB, 310.

make grace the epiphenomenon of nature.⁵⁵ The relationship between natural and special revelation can perhaps be best understood from the standpoint of eschatology. From this standpoint, the total revelation of God to the world is homogenous from beginning to end; despite all its modal changes it remains the same revelation. The revelation in creation is not surpassed or made superfluous by the revelation of grace and glory. 'To think otherwise would be to adopt a gnostic and Marcionite cast of mind: God then would contradict himself and as Redeemer would destroy what he has set up as Creator'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the *revelatio specialis* is not an addition to the *revelatio genere*. 'It would be much more true to say that, if God's revelation of himself in his effects and works proceed from the supernatural will and act implicit in his revelation, and if spiritual nature is already bound to "the perfect submission to divine truths" that moves outward from this act, then this revelation in works, in its ultimate, decisive intention, is still the beginning and outbreak of God's supernatural revelation in his Word in which that divine act now emerges in view'.⁵⁷

5. Theological A Priori

But what about the general knowledge of God based on the natural revelation of God? Balthasar's Christology and theology of grace has opened the way for him to speak of a theological a priori. Erich Przywara has interpreted the *analogia entis* in the light of the Thomist doctrine of *potentia* - the creature's potentiality for God.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Word and Revelation*, 74-76.

⁵⁶ *GL* I:303.

⁵⁷ *KB*, 314.

⁵⁸ See Zeitz, 'Analogy', 482-483.

The *analogia entis* is characterised as the 'creaturely principle and thus internal to the limitless openness of the movement of becoming'; it is the restless potentiality of the creature for the divine - the *potentia oboedientialis*, the totally objective availability of the creature for God.⁵⁹ Balthasar brings analogy more deeply into the event of revelation by setting it within the context of cataloging, thereby interpreting the *analogia entis* in more theological terms.⁶⁰ The *potentia* is now conceived as the theological *a priori*, which is different from the religious *a priori* of liberalism.

In the camp of liberal theology, and of the psychology and philosophy of religion, the theology of *lumen fidei* confronts the concept of the religious *a priori*. This concept need not be rejected: it must only be understood correctly. There is a natural religious *a priori*, given with the essence of the creature as such, which coincides with its ability to understand all existents in the light of Being, which is analogous to and points to God. Provided it does not get caught up in detailed analysis of partial aspects of Being, natural ontology is very largely always also a form of natural theology. When we spoke of a theological *a priori*, however, we did not mean this, but rather the ontological and epistemological elevation and illumination of this *a priori* by the light of the interior fullness of God's life as he reveals himself. But this manifestation of God does not only dawn on those who expressly call themselves Christians, but basically to all men. This is so because all are called to a vision of God in eternal life and, therefore, however secretly, all are placed in God's grace in an interior relationship to this light of revelation. Therefore many aspects of what the non-Christian sphere called the 'religious *a priori*' and is described in religious experience must, in fact, be shot through with elements of grace.⁶¹

Thus there is in man a dynamism (*desiderum naturale intellectus*) for God compelled by grace. This theological *a priori* serves as the foundation for all instruction from outside. It is the *sensorum* which enables man to perceive the meaning of the revelation. 'In the theological *a priori*, knowledge about the quality of the divine is

⁵⁹ KB, 255.

⁶⁰ Henrici, 'Balthasar', 165-166.

⁶¹ GL I:167.

found imbedded in the attitude of faith towards the sovereign Light'. Through this a priori the receiver is 'ready to consider and recognise that every command issuing from the light in its incomprehensible freedom is an expression of the deepest necessity on the part of the light'.⁶²

Now though the theological a priori for Balthasar involves aesthetically the whole person, the relationship between reason and faith must nevertheless be addressed. In the light of his theology of grace Balthasar argues that because natural reason is found in the concrete supernatural order, it must correspondingly possess a *de facto* link with supernatural faith. The unity of the world order makes this conclusion inevitable.⁶³ Reason is thus fructified by faith just as the *preambula fidei* are drawn into faith. 'The light of grace works upon the reasoning subject bringing the person to suddenly see and believe. There is a moment when the interior light of the eyes of faith becomes one with the exterior light of the form perceived and the beholder cries out: "We have found ..." (John 1:45). God is known in God'.⁶⁴ Thus when one speaks of faith, even in the specific (Christian) sense, human reason, while being challenged to its very roots, is required nothing which is unnatural to it. 'On the contrary, grace calls on reason to fulfill the most natural aspects of its identity',⁶⁵ which is not only to know God but to acknowledge him in all its logical thinking.⁶⁶ For Balthasar, then, the circle between revelation and faith is not as closed as Barth

⁶² GL I:163.

⁶³ KB, 251.

⁶⁴ Leahy, 'Aesthetics', 44-45.

⁶⁵ KB, 311.

⁶⁶ GL II:29.

would have it.

Is there a difference between Balthasar's theological *a priori* and Rahner's *potentia oboedientialis*? Rahner postulates that the universal human experience would be intelligible without the transcendent (numinous) which Christians call God. This experience is located within the historical environment that people experience in their ordinary lives so that the transcendence of God is given its due emphasis without ousting his imminent involvement in the world.⁶⁷ Rahner argues that humans transcend nature in their every questioning and thinking. That is to say, humans are not closed in on themselves. Rather there is an openness of being, an orientation and receptivity to the divine revelation. Transcendental reflection in philosophy has as its goal the discovery of the preconditions of human knowledge and experience, 'the *a priori* transcendental condition for the possibility of [human] subjectivity'.⁶⁸ Accordingly, Rahner argues that the transcendental experience of man substantiates the fact that humans are generally predisposed towards the divine, which is not alien to nature but the intrinsic condition of human subjectivity. He spoke of this capacity as the *potentia obeodientialis*, the obedential potency or openness for the revelation of God.

[It is] a capacity of dynamic self-movement of the spirit, given *a priori* with human nature directed towards all possible objects. It is a movement in which the particular object is, as it were, grasped as an individual factor of this movement towards a goal, and so consciously grasped in a pre-view of this absolute breadth of the knowable.⁶⁹

... man is that existent thing who stands before the free God who may

⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 87.

⁶⁸ *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

possibly reveal himself.⁷⁰

For Rahner, this potency is embedded in human nature itself. There is a sense in which this potency has a noetic aspect, although this knowledge is unthematic and nonreflexive. This means that it is latent, preconscious and dormant, but nonetheless embedded in human nature. Hence the Raherian notion of *potentia obeodentialis*, notwithstanding its noetic structure, is more correctly an innate moral consciousness that bespeaks of the divine. This is not entirely surprising, given Rahner's indebtedness to Kant.

Notwithstanding the family resemblances between the two, certain crucial differences must be noted. Firstly, Rahner begins with the subjectivity of the human person while Balthasar starts with God and his concrete revelation in history. Although he maintains that revelation is a transcendent gift from God, Rahner seems to accentuate the continuity between the human spirit and this gift in a way that is not at all acceptable to Balthasar. Furthermore, Balthasar is highly suspicious of Rahner's transcendental anthropology. To him Rahner's methodology not only subsumes the truths of faith under a philosophical system, it also fails to do justice to the Cross and resurrection. Balthasar's critique of Rahner's Anonymous Christianity is well known and crucial here. For him Rahner is guilty of relativising the Cross of Christ and the Church.

Secondly, Balthasar's approach is thoroughly Christocentric. As such it is radically different from Rahner's *Vögriff*. For Rahner, this pre-comprehension in man which gives him access to transcendence is understood in the context of the supernatural existential. For Balthasar, however, everything revolves around the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

mystery of Christ, the unique and ultimate *form* of the revelation of God. In other words, Rahner's *Vorgriff* speaks of the pre-apprehension of limitlessness while Balthasar speaks of the *Gestalthaftigkeit des Wesen*, the potential orientation of being towards concrete form.⁷¹

The problems of sin and idolatry must now be discussed. What does sin do to the noetic capabilities of man, and how does Balthasar understand idolatry in relation to the general knowledge of God that we have been discussing? Following the declaration of Vatican I, Balthasar argues that the sinner continues to have a true capacity for theological knowledge: 'For if man does not have the capacity as man for contacting God, if he is not relating to the real God in each of his conditions, then, there is neither responsibility in the true sense nor sin nor redemption. Otherwise man could by nature be an atheist and the fact of faith could in itself be neither reasonable nor shown to be reasonable'.⁷² Balthasar however agrees with Aquinas that due to human finitude and sin, '[t]he natural investigation of reason does not *suffice* for the human race in knowing divine things, even those things that can be shown to be reasonable'.⁷³ In Barthian language, man's noetic capacity is limited because of the ontological abyss between God and creature and the abyss caused by the sin of the creature. For Balthasar, the 'darkening' caused by original and actual sin has 'the same range in the soul of the sinner as does God's inherent openness in his knowledge. Or, in the words of Paul's letter to the Romans: the refusal to acknowledge God extends as far as the knowledge of him does'. Again: 'The false

⁷¹ Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', *Analogy of Beauty*, 20.

⁷² *KB*, 320.

⁷³ *ST* II/II, q. 2 a. 4, ad 1.

image of the idols that the sinner forms for himself cover up the very place that has been reserved in his spirit for the true God'.⁷⁴ But this can only be so because 'men have from time immemorial been in touch with the sphere and quality of the divine'.⁷⁵ The sinful pagan cannot not know God by nature. To be sure his rejection of God's supernatural grace has resulted in the creation of a concept of God that is not 'error-free'. Here Balthasar uses the Augustinian notion of being 'off target' (*peccatum*) to his theological epistemology. Idolatry then is conceived as the pagan's 'miscarried knowledge' of the divine 'in spite of all its correct moments'.⁷⁶

6. Balthasar and Reformed Theology

How does Balthasar's theological epistemology compare with that of Reformed theology in general, and Calvin in particular? There are grounds to believe that there are many areas of agreement between the two. Calvin argues that through the Fall, the whole nature of man is corrupt and perverted.⁷⁷ Because sin is nothing short of rebellion against God, man is justly condemned.⁷⁸ For Calvin, fallen man is spiritually dead, not just sick. The Reformed tradition in teaching that sin effects the whole person because it is the rebellion of the whole man, *totus ego*, against God, is concerned, rightly, to correct the teaching in Scholasticism that sin affects only the lower gifts of man, that is, the sensual part of his nature corrupted while his reason

⁷⁴ KB, 321-2.

⁷⁵ KB, 322.

⁷⁶ KB, 322.

⁷⁷ *Serm. on Eph.* 2:1f., 4:17; *Serm. on Gal.* 5:19-23.

⁷⁸ *Serm. on John* 3:6.

remained unimpaired.⁷⁹ Calvin argues that the whole man, including his mind,⁸⁰ is perverted so that through the fall man has degenerated from nature to de-nature; he is not simply wounded in nature.⁸¹ Accordingly, he taught that in Christ we are to become wholly new; in him we receive a new nature.⁸² We have therefore to do here not with the reparation of man, but an entirely new creation.⁸³

But there is another side to this, for the theological anthropology of the Reformer is more dialectical than is usually noticed. The *Imago Dei* is all but effaced in man, so that there can be found in fallen man a remnant of it. This apparent contradiction in Calvin's thought can be clarified when the Reformer's perspectival anthropology is appreciated as a whole. To frame the matter in the light of our present discussion we could say that Calvin teaches that fallen man still has a dim awareness of God, but this is perverted because of sin and rebellion. This knowledge then becomes the fountainhead of superstition and irreligion.⁸⁴ Both Barth and Balthasar would agree to this.⁸⁵ Calvin goes on to say that though this light in man

⁷⁹ *Instit.* II.2.4; see also *Serm. on Eph.* 2:3f., and 4:17f; *Comm. on Ezek.* 11:19, 20.

⁸⁰ *Comm. on Gen.* 8:21; 3:1; *Comm. on Ezek.* 18:20; *Comm. on Rom.* 2:28f; 7:14f.; *Comm. on Eph.* 4:19; *Comm. on Gen.* 8:21.

⁸¹ *Comm. on Gen.* 8:21.

⁸² *Instit.* II.3.6-9; Cf. II.1.9; II.5.19.

⁸³ *Instit.* II.3.6; II.5.15.

⁸⁴ *Instit.* I.4.1; I.5.11f.; 14f.; I.2.8; 2.2.24; *Comm. on Rom.* 1:20; *Comm. on I Cor.* 1:21; *Comm. on Heb.* 11:3; *Comm. on Ps.* 97.7f.; *Comm. on John* 3:6; *Comm. on Acts* 17:23.

⁸⁵ *CD* I/2, 280ff. And Balthasar: 'Idols ... are not only carved images. Idols that obscure God can be practices like Buddhist meditation, theories of how to experience the divine, speculation about the absolute in the manner of Hegel - anything that pre-empt the place where God plans to raise the figure in a shape that is unguessable'.

has turned to darkness, it is not wholly extinguished. The light consists of two parts: the seed of religion and conscience. Calvin is of course careful to add that this light is of no advantage to man as far as his salvation is concerned, for in seeing he does not see. Natural reason will not direct man to Christ.⁸⁶ Still, Calvin does not deny the existence of this knowledge.

This brings us then to Calvin's doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis*. The *sensus divinitatis* must not be confused with two other concepts of Calvin found in *Instit.* I.5.4-5, that of the *semen divinitatis* and the *insignia divinitatis in homine*. The latter two refer to the evidences within man, that is, in the functioning of his body and soul, that points to the fact that he is made by God. They refer to those aspects of humanity which points to its Source or Creator. The *sensus divinitatis*, and the related metaphor, *semen religionis*, refers to actual religious knowledge (*notitia*). It is the noetic openness of the human mind to God given by God himself.⁸⁷ Calvin therefore is in agreement with Justin Martyr who asserts that the unity of God is engraved in the hearts of all men.⁸⁸ The *sensus* is therefore the knowledge of the existence of God.⁸⁹ Because of sin, the universality of religion means the universality of idolatry.⁹⁰ This means that true knowledge of God is the presupposition of idolatry.

Several important conclusions can be made at this point. The first is that

'Theology and Aesthetic', 68-69.

⁸⁶ *Comm. on John* 1:5.

⁸⁷ *Instit.* I.3.1.

⁸⁸ *Instit.* I.3.1.

⁸⁹ *Instit.* I.3.3; I.3.1.

⁹⁰ *Instit.* I.3.1.

Calvin's concept of the 'seed of religion' is closer to Balthasar's theological a priori than the religious a priori of liberal Protestantism, or even Rahner's *potentia obsequentialis*. The latter two present a formal possibility, a precondition to knowledge, while Calvin's notion of the *sensus divinitatis* is a material and existential concept which refers to actual knowledge or *notitia*. Calvin is however more guarded in his language. He would not, for instance, define idolatry in the way Balthasar did. For him the whole movement of natural theology is perverted by the fall. And yet, Calvin speaks of a shadow of religion, and the tension in man even in his idolatry. 'So impossible it is to blot this from man's mind that natural disposition would be more easily altered, as altered indeed it is when man voluntarily sinks from his natural haughtiness to the very depths in order to honour God'.⁹¹

Instit. 1.6.14 has been understood by several Calvin scholars as the *locus classicus* of his discussion on natural theology. 'Here I do not yet touch upon the sort of knowledge to which every order of nature would have led us if Adam had remained upright (*Si integer stetisset Adam*)'.⁹² Natural theology, Calvin seems to be saying here, is possible before the fall but not after. But this does not mean that man after the fall is exonerated, for he is not so blind that he can plead ignorance.⁹³ Commenting on Romans 1:19, Calvin writes: 'And where Paul teaches that what is to be known of God is made plain from the creation of the universe (Rom. 1:19) he does not signify such a manifestation as man's discernment can comprehend; but,

⁹¹ *Instit.* 1.3.1.

⁹² *Instit.* 1.2.1.

⁹³ *Comm. on Rom.* 1.20.

rather, shows it not to go further than render them inexcusable'.⁹⁴ Calvin has insisted also that one can come to the knowledge of God and his revelation only through the Word. Nevertheless he does make reference to man's perception of the divine in the created order by using metaphors which suggests that man is suffering not from blindness but from a weak vision.⁹⁵

Broadly speaking, Balthasar's understanding of natural revelation, the general knowledge of God, and the relationship between general and special revelation have much in common with that of the Reformer. For Balthasar, the Word (Christ) is the *Gestalt* of Christianity, the one and only exposition of God (John 1:18). The task of theology is to 'read' the figure of Christ, who is the cornerstone of the theological edifice, the norm for theology and theological knowledge.⁹⁶ In his revelation, Balthasar argues, God performs a symphony. The Son directs this symphony, and through him the meaning of the variety in the symphony becomes clear.⁹⁷ But, like Calvin, Balthasar would maintain that the 'world is a stage which has been set up for the encounter of the whole God with the whole man'.⁹⁸

7. Philosophy and Theology

We come finally to Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between

⁹⁴ *Instit.* 1.6.14.

⁹⁵ *Instit.* 1.6.1.

⁹⁶ See 'Theology and Aesthetics', 64-65; *GL* I:463-525; 'God is his own Exegete', *Communio* 4 (1986), 280 -286; *GL* I:429-684.

⁹⁷ *Truth is Symphonic*, 8.

⁹⁸ *GL* I:220f.; 303.

philosophy and theology. How does Balthasar see the relationship between the two in the context of his christocentric vision and his theology of grace? Balthasar warns of two extreme ways in which this relationship can be conceived. The first is Christian positivism which posits the dissolution of philosophy into theology in such a way that the old term philosophy loses all meaning and intelligibility. The second is that of bringing the formal object of theology so near to that of philosophy as to create a false identity. This would result in the absorption of Christian contemplation by the contemplation of being. Through his christocentric perspective, Balthasar hopes to avoid these dangers by according due respect to the integral dignity of reason and philosophy, holding them within the horizon opened by revelation on the one hand, and, freeing theology, as it were, from the notion that it could develop as a science only through the mediation of philosophy on the other.⁹⁹

For Balthasar, then, the separation of philosophy from theology is inconceivable. Since all men are called to the vision of God in eternal life, all are also placed in an interior relationship to the light of revelation by God's grace which is secretly at work in the 'whole sphere of history and thus all myths, philosophies, and poetic creations' which are capable of 'housing within themselves an intimation of divine glory'.¹⁰⁰ The philosophising mind, however, needs revelation, since, while 'the heathen can possess fragments of revelation, the Biblical revelation', Balthasar maintains, 'contains the *logos* in its entirety'.¹⁰¹ As soon as philosophy has acquired for itself a method which denies the reliance of any sources outside the philosophising

⁹⁹ Scola, 'Nature', 226.

¹⁰⁰ Leahy, 'Aesthetics', 44.

¹⁰¹ *GL* 1:71.

mind, 'speculation about God soon lost its cosmic character, and is reduced to a purely a priori form of ratiocination only to reveal in the end (late eighteenth century) what it had been all along: a titanic human construction'.¹⁰² Balthasar therefore insists that philosophy must be seen in the light of revelation. Revelation challenges 'man essentially in his act of faith and brings philosophical knowledge, along with its *eros*, to its interior goal'.¹⁰³ Together with Origen, Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, then, Balthasar understands the *intellectus fidei* as 'including this interior completion of the philosophical act in theology - then we may indeed make a clear distinction methodologically between the field of what man can attain on the basis of the light of his own reason and what he has become accessible to him on the basis of revelation alone'.¹⁰⁴

But this continuity can only be understood in the light of the more radical discontinuity. Balthasar's Christology and theology of the Cross demand this. Hence Balthasar could say that 'Christianity is destroyed if it lets itself be reduced to transcendental presuppositions of man's self-understanding, whether in thought or life'.¹⁰⁵ The trinitarian God who is manifested in the *Gestalt* of Christ is not only the answer to the cosmological search for completion and man's quest for answers. He who is the Way, Truth and Life is the answer that questions all answers. The Biblical revelation, which leads to the unmeasurable measure of love that is in the formed formlessness of the obedience of Christ radically destroys all worldly

¹⁰² Dupré, 'Glory', 393.

¹⁰³ *GL* I:46.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Love Alone*, 43.

aesthetics, including all classical notions of beauty, harmony and proportions. This end signals the emergence of the divine aesthetics.¹⁰⁶ The radiance of the Triune God provides a new harmony, proportion and beauty in the Incarnation and the Cross - the cruciform love of God. Theological aesthetics is based on the perfect proportion of the form of Christ in his obedience to the Father.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless the form which 'gives expression to the meaning of a radically sinful existence' is in some way related beyond itself to the form of the Redeemer which in turn 'takes the modalities of fallen existence upon itself so as to transvalue them by redemptive suffering'.¹⁰⁸ One commentator puts it like this.

The cross is the place of the nuptial encounter where everything creaturely is reduced to silence only to be glorified in obedience. The human cry reaching up to heaven for glory is sheltered within the divine glory hidden in the cry which lies at the heart of the *Triduum mortis*. Jesus' cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?', encloses both the basic philosophical question at the human centre: 'why is there something at all and not nothing?' and the cruciformed why-lessness of Christ's love reaching to us from the divine centre.¹⁰⁹

From the standpoint of the Cross then, philosophy either knows too much or too little. Too much because it attempts to speak boldly at the point where the Word of God is silent, suffers and dies. And this in order to show that which is beyond the grasp of philosophy, and which could only be available through faith in the ever greater trinitarian love of God. The Word also reveals that which philosophy can form no conclusion about - that the death of one man can restore all men to God. Too little

¹⁰⁶ GL I:460.

¹⁰⁷ GL VII:262.

¹⁰⁸ GL I:461.

¹⁰⁹ Leahy, 'Aesthetics', 28.

because philosophy cannot measure - indeed, it has no inkling of - the abyss into which the Word descends. Consequently it could only close the hiatus or else disguise it with garlands. So, philosophy either misconceives the nature of man and fails to take seriously his earthly existence, as in Platonism and Gnosticism. Or it elevates him in such a way as to make him the exact image and likeness of God; so exact that in actuality God is brought down and formed in man's image. Thus Balthasar concludes:

If philosophy is not willing to content itself with either, speaking abstractly of being, or with thinking concretely of the earthly and worldly (and no further), then it must at once empty itself in order to 'know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2). Then it may, starting out from this source, go on to 'impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification' (Ibid., 2:7). This proclamation, however, rises up over a deeper silence and a darker abyss than pure philosophy can know.¹¹⁰

8. Conclusion

That Balthasar's theology is deeply influenced by Karl Barth is evident throughout his work on theological aesthetics. *The Glory of the Lord* can be said to be an interaction with, and in a sense, a development of Barth's theological epistemology. To be sure Balthasar is uneasy with Barth's 'revelatory positivism', to use the term coined by Bonhoeffer. And though the thought of Barth does play an important part in his theology, Balthasar was nonetheless also influenced by other 'figures' in the history of Western thought. His theological aesthetics is the meeting point of complementarity of past, present and future. This has to be so, since for Balthasar it is the whole form of Christ that must be kept in view. The methodologies

¹¹⁰ MP, 66.

of Irenaeus, Augustine, Anselm and Pascal, different though they are, complement each other¹¹¹ and provide leaven for all ages, since they are interpretations of God's glory.¹¹² It is true to say that as one of Barth's most penetrating critics and admirers, Balthasar was willing to go a long way with Barth.¹¹³ Both were alive to the dangers of the control of natural theology over revelation in modern theology. Barth's anxiety is all too clear when one observes his battles with theologians like Brunner and Althaus. Although not willing to go as far as Barth in ousting natural theology, Balthasar is also acutely aware of the dangers of the immanentalism that pervades the modern understanding of the God-world relationship and has led to the erosion of Christian distinctiveness. This concern comes to clear expression in his deep suspicion of the approach of Rahner who has gone so far as to speak of the 'anonymous Christian', a term which is self-contradictory for Balthasar. Finally, both theologians see the revelation of God as centred in Jesus Christ and fulfilled in the Cross. The incarnation, then, has profound significance for both theologians. Incarnation moves inexorably to the Cross. This means that the Cross is the place where the God-world relationship must be understood. Hence both theologians are worthy to be named as theologians of the Cross.

But against the Luther-Kierkegaard-Barth theology of discontinuity, Balthasar wants to argue for a continuity. Better still, he wishes to argue for a continuity within a radical discontinuity, to see incarnation and Cross in terms of transformation and

¹¹¹ *GL* II: 11-17.

¹¹² *GL* IV:21.

¹¹³ John Thompson, 'Barth and Balthasar: An ecumenical Dialogue', *Beauty of Christ. An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Edited by Bede McGregor, O.P. and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 175.

fulfillment. This continuity is demanded by the incarnation itself since the Word becoming flesh presupposes 'that there must be a relatively solid content of meaning that cannot be totally robbed of its substance when we provisionally abstract from our supernatural goal'.¹¹⁴ Even the Cross does not totally obliterate this continuity. For if the *analogia crucis* is truly to penetrate our entire vision of reality, it must be linked at some point with an idea of God that is based on the *analogia entis*. Balthasar therefore sees the importance, indeed the indispensability, of the *analogia fidei*; but this does not mean that one can do away with the *analogia entis*. He does not believe that one is here faced with an either/or situation. Louis Dupré writes: 'Von Balthasar agrees with Barth that a Christian aesthetic must start from the Cross. He differs from him, however, in not admitting any definitive *caesura* between this theology of form and a philosophical aesthetic'.¹¹⁵ Balthasar seeks to overcome what he sees to be the fruitless alternative between the analogy of faith and the analogy of being by developing what is called a 'catalogical analogy' based on the kenosis, Incarnation and Cross. By so doing he tries to avoid the danger of formulating a concept of analogy capable of sustaining itself - a concept of analogy based on a metaphysics independent of revelation and based on the abstract notion of nature. Thus Balthasar seeks to bring the *analogia fidei* and *analogia entis* into a christological and trinitarian framework in which one can speak about the assumption of the latter into the former without endangering the integrity of the created order.

¹¹⁴ KB, 362.

¹¹⁵ Louis Dupré, 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics', *Communio*, Vol 16 (1989), 389.

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